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THE NEW REPUBLIC

October 7, 1978 One Dollar

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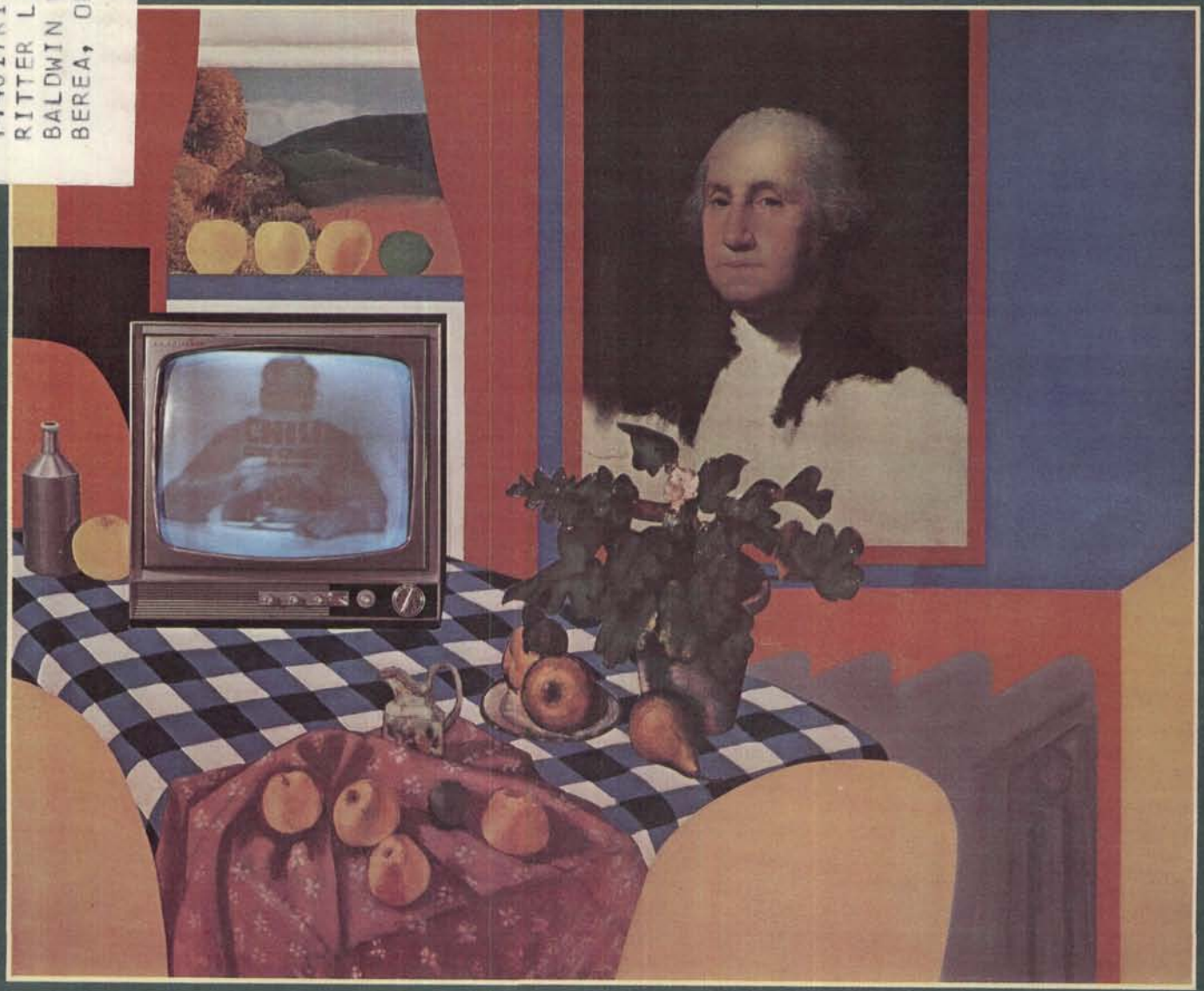

James Lardner on Love and Television

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TRB

from Washington
October 7, 1978

Clackety-Clack

"By golly," groaned President Eisenhower to Jim Hagerty after he had campaigned up and down the country in the midterm election of 1954, "sometimes you get tired of all this clackety-clack!"

He had reason to sigh. Democrats won 19 House seats. Yes, all his efforts and all those of Vice President Nixon, who flew 26,000 miles preaching that Democrats were "soft on Communism," couldn't overcome the tradition that the "out" party gains House seats at midterm. Poor Ike; he saw Democrats take control of Congress in 1955, which they have held ever since—23 years.

Now there's another midterm election in five weeks and Republicans theoretically should gain a lot of seats. Will they? Or are they finished as a party (as some say)? And is the two-party system collapsing, too? With the single exception of 1934 (when the New Deal hurricane was still blowing and Democrats gained 14 more House seats) the "out party" has won at every midterm since President Buchanan in 1858; that's as far back as my figures go.

What with polls and primaries the media have become a kind of umpire in campaigns, and I can see a political plenum of press pundits getting ready now to go to work. It wasn't that Ed Muskie lacked a majority in the New Hampshire presidential primary in 1972—he won; but the press had picked him as "front runner" and handicapped him to break 50 percent to "win." He got 46 percent, more than anybody else, but the men in TV booths and editors in newsrooms said it was a "defeat." Four years earlier, Lyndon Johnson's showing wasn't up to press expectations in New Hampshire either. Both men later dropped out.

Why should the opposition party make gains at midterm? "The president in office has less unifying and nationalizing influence than he had as a candidate," explained political scientist Arthur Millspaugh. "The congressional candidates of the opposition party are decidedly on their own. In general, localism prevails and issues are obscured far more than when the public interest is nationally aroused." That's the way it is today. Historian James MacGregor Burns said "Let's end midterm elections"; they don't mean anything and only impair the authority of the White House. Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson both favored amending the Constitution to allow congruent presidential-representative terms, to reduce the midterm's importance.

Well, anyhow, here we go again and this time Jimmy Carter's authority doesn't seem likely to be much affected despite eager Republican efforts to pump up the Kemp-Roth tax issue. The Republican minority is about as low as it can go—1-to-2 in the House, and 1-to-3 in the Senate—but this doesn't mean so much when party lines are eroding. In 1974 Democrats gained 43 House seats at midterm, right after the Nixon resignation. It was different in 1970 when Nixon, supported by the alliterative Spiro Agnew, made one of the most hateful midterm presidential drives on record, testing the theory of the "great silent majority" and accusing opponents of being soft on violence and permissiveness. At San Jose he attacked anti-war protests as the work of "thugs and hoodlums." Democrats gained 12 seats. *Time* magazine called it a Republican "defeat . . . the shrill pitch did not work." Nixon, however, hailed it as a "tremendous success." Then, as always, it was astonishing to see his boldness, skill and audacity.

This reporter went into the White House with a colleague in 1966 to visit Lyndon Johnson on another matter, and the subject of the impending election naturally came up. Why would he put his prestige on the line, we wondered, when the out party normally won 25 to 30 seats at midterm? In the face of our statistics Johnson vehemently denied that the bounce-back rule would apply, at least to him. Later, however, he cited the figures at a press conference, and called off a 10-state campaign tour. Republicans, in fact, gained 47 seats.

Peter Teeley, amiable director of communications of the Republican National Committee, is the latest to deny the bounce-back phenomenon. Challenging a statement by Democratic chairman John White, which I quoted elsewhere, that the out-party normally gains about "30 seats" at off-years, Teeley writes me, "Mr. White is not exactly correct. The average loss in the House to the party controlling the White House is six seats in the President's first term. It is in the second term where the heavy losses occur." The latter losses, he says, have averaged "54 seats" since the Roosevelt administration.

Tut, tut, Mr. Teeley. This is a nice alibi, I think, for an expected poor showing. My figures are—subject to correction—Truman lost 56 seats in his first term in 1946; Ike 19 in 1954; Kennedy two in 1962, and Nixon 12 in 1970 as cited earlier. It would be unfair to average in that 43-seat loss of poor Jerry Ford in 1974. But even so, it comes to about 20 seats, not six, as the Teeley variant of the bounce-back law calculates it. In fact this is the only time the variant has ever been cited, so far as I know, and speaks well for the imagination of GOP GHQ.

This election may be notable in another way—the lowest turnout in modern times. It is a sad record: the turnout as a percentage of those eligible was 46.1 percent in 1962; 45.4 percent in 1966; 43.5 percent in 1970; 38 percent in 1974. It goes steadily downhill, a worrying sign of political decadence. In Canada 70 to 75 percent vote. In the US it is harder and harder to tell the parties apart; more and more people say, what's the use. Fewer and fewer vote. It is a vicious circle. Some turn to one-shot, non-compromising, single-issue pressure groups, like the gun lobby or the anti-abortion lobby.

One of the biggest battles this year is the referendum in Missouri to enact a right-to-work law. Rival sides are spending millions. Twenty states have such laws now, mostly in the South; this is an effort by militant conservatives to carry the fight into the first big industrialized state, a kind of Proposition 13 in labor relations. "A long step backward toward days of the open shop and bitter industrial discord," says *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

There's a lot of talk about Teddy Kennedy running for president in 1980. I discount it. Carter's withdrawal would be an admission of party failure. Kennedy will be chairman of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee next year, succeeding the reactionary Eastland of Mississippi. And, Kennedy, born in 1932, is only 46. People forget that. He can wait. In election year 1992, for example, he will still be younger than Jerry Ford or Ronald Reagan are now.

And so, as Jimmy said to Menachem at the end of Camp David, "Shalom, you-all."

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Correspondence

Filling the vacuum

To the editors:

Irving Howe's "The Right Menace" (*TNR*, Sept. 9) should be required reading for all activists on the left of the political spectrum.

In addition to those discussed by Howe, another major reason for the rightward turn in American politics has been the willingness of Democratic Party officials and officeholders to succumb to the pressure from the aggressive and well-financed right-wing movements on practically every controversial issue from abortion to zoning. In private conversations, too many Democratic elected officials and candidates will admit the rightist positions on such issues are detrimental, if not devastating, but they cop out by using the old dodge; "But I'd better go along because, if I don't, I may lose my office to one of those right-wing kooks, and then we'd be worse off than before."

The vacuum in political action and dialogue created by Democratic Party capitulation on conservative positions and proposals must be and can be filled by progressive activists and candidates from the left.

Here in Michigan, we have just concluded a long and strenuous campaign for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. The campaign was initiated and fostered by a leftist coalition of liberals and democratic socialists. We finished a strong second in a race where we were outspent two and three to one by three "mainstream" Democrats. In the process, we proved that tens of thousands of people from every corner of the nation's seventh largest state are willing to support, work for and vote for demonstrably progressive proposals *as long as those proposals are reasonably related to specific needs and problems and can be implemented within a reasonable time under existing financial constraints.* During the last two months of the campaign, ours was the solitary voice openly and vigorously opposing Proposition 13-type tax limitation proposals, and we are convinced that our firm position on that issue gained rather than lost votes.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the entire campaign was the fact that during 14 months of constant exposure to the news media and audiences of every conceivable composition, we were red-baited only twice and not very enthusiastically or coherently at that. To be sure, in the final election against the Republicans it might have been otherwise, but, nonetheless, those of us in the campaign are satisfied that an influential electoral movement within the framework of a two-party system generated from the left is both possible and necessary.

Irving Howe is right when he says that "there is a big political fight ahead." And when liberals and other progressives to the left enter the fray, and enter it they must, they should do so with their true colors flying. Otherwise the American people will not be able to choose sides according to their better instincts and interests, and they will continue to be the losers.

Zolton Ferency
East Lansing, Michigan

To the editors:

It's too bad that Irving Howe in his piece on the New Right (*TNR*, Sept. 9) had to repeat the canard that the government "bailed out" Penn Central. The government did nothing of the sort. The stockholders and bondholders of Penn Central long ago went down the drain. The railroad's managers have retired, or are working at new jobs, or are looking for them. The people who were bailed out, if that is the proper expression, were the shippers who prefer to use other forms of transportation, but want the railroads kept around to haul coal, lumber and other heavy, bulky commodities which can only be moved by rail.

C. D. Norling
Richfield, Minnesota

Somewhere he's chuckling

To the editors:

Congratulations to Michael Kinsley for seeing through the quotation, currently making the journalistic rounds, in which H.L. Mencken allegedly predicted 50 years ago the characteristics of President Carter and his relatives ("Washington Diarist," *TNR*, Sept. 9).

Mencken would have enjoyed the joke, for he himself proudly admitted authorship of a delightful hoax concerning the White House. In an article for the N.Y. *Evening Mail* of 28 December 1917, Mencken wrote that President Millard Fillmore in 1851 was the first chief executive to install a bathtub in the White House, nine years after the device had been designed by a Cincinnati man; and he made up a lot of other "facts" about the history of the bathtub, "all of them deliberate and most of them obvious," as he commented some years later.

It came to Mencken as a surprise to discover that many people "took my idle jocosities with complete seriousness," and that his "facts" about bathtubs were discussed on the floor of Congress and in Europe, even making their way into "standard works of reference." Now, more than 60 years later, people still cite Fillmore's installation of a tub as a documented datum. It is very likely, 60 years hence, people will marvel at Mencken's prescience about a president from the Deep South. *Some* people will believe *anything*.

Caldwell Titcomb
Department of Music
Brandeis University

Teachers' unions

To the editors:

It makes me sad to know that you must accept such deceptive advertising as the one about poor Anne Parks who was happy to accept whatever salary increases she received through the efforts of the teachers' union but was unwilling to pay her dues (The National Right to Work Legal Defense Fund advertisement, Sept. 9).

I was a teacher for many years and I *know* that whatever increases (and they were small) we received were a result of united effort on the part of our teachers' association (union?).

I read various liberal publications and see the attempt to brainwash their readers—and economics requires these publications to accept such ads. Damn.

Fortunately (for me) my husband is a small-town but successful lawyer so I could give the whole thing up, but I am not so stupid that I cannot see what is happening to publications such as yours. Damn.

Mary A. Keith
Peru, Indiana

Correction:

In Jack Beatty's review of Robert Heilbroner's *Beyond Boom and Crash* (September 23rd), the sentence at the end of the third paragraph should read: "After 1973 there could be no return to the unclouded confidence of the boom years."

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

October 7, 1978

Please Remain Calm

Hysteria is not a cure but a disease, which has not kept it from being the choice response of liberals to their problems. The latest wave of panic has swept in as a result of the recent Democratic party primary defeats in Massachusetts and Minnesota—justifiably counted among the country's most advanced democracies—of two officially anointed liberals by two others, rightly characterized as retrogrades, reactionaries, primitives, jingoists—simple-minded labels often are inappropriate, but they're nice to have available for deserving people like these two gentlemen.

The case of defeated Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, however, is clearly one of mistaken identity. If he has many genuine *bona fides* as a man of progressive instinct and liberal policy, then the editors of *The New Republic* may just all be Arabs. To be sure, Dukakis rose to political prominence through the support of those elements in the commonwealth that insist on some minimal decency from their tribunes; and this tight and humorless climber was adept enough to provide it. But on the record, going back a long way, his deepest commitments were to himself. When the Democratic party was pledged to interventionism here, there, everywhere, so was he—the more dubious the place, the more eager his exuberance. When the party deserted its foreign campaigns, he straggled home too. But it's primarily on domestic issues that a state legislator or governor makes his history. The simple truth is that Dukakis was a scourge of the poor, full of heartfelt encouragement for other people's sacrifices, mostly those of the disadvantaged. The mentally ill of Massachusetts, for example, have borne the burdens of his self-righteous chintziness. Other victims—besides the usual blacks and the inchoate white lumpenproletariat—were state troopers, fishermen and smaller ethnic clusters like the Portuguese. Dukakis had barely lifted his hand from the inauguration Bible before he earned himself the enmity of two of Massachusetts's most inventive and energetic liberals: State Representative Barney Frank, a volcanic Harvard man from Bayonne, New Jersey, who has amply what the Irish call moxie; and Democratic National Committeeman Jerome Grossman, a heretic who has won power in the party by changing it rather than changing himself. These two true liberals do not dislike casually.

Dukakis ran for governor four years ago against Frank Sargent, a mugwump Republican incumbent with generous impulses, and he ran on a lie: he wouldn't raise taxes, he promised. The savvy folk knew he was lying. The others voted for him. In the event, he did raise taxes and then, new revenues notwithstanding, he took the axe to the human services budgets. As an alternative to substantive liberal governance, Dukakis tried, Common Cause-style, to please the liberals by riding to work on the subway. When he flew hat in hand to Washington, he went coach. Years ago these antics would have made him a demagogue. By now, of course, they merely put him in that big crowd of modern political manipulators of symbols. He was a Bay State Jerry Brown, but without whimsy. Nevertheless, these gestures had some residual appeal to those high-minded Massachusetts constituencies which, generally well-off and comfortable themselves, urge others to abjure comfort. Dukakis, they thought, was just the kind of man to teach the people how to avoid self-indulgence. What's more, during the awful winter blizzards, he was on the tube nightly—communicating. Oh, how we want our leaders to communicate with

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us—and with *them*, to keep all of *them* calm.

But Dukakis didn't really communicate. He broke the Massachusetts Irish machine, but without normative purpose. Therefore, he had nothing to say to those whom that machine had served and served relatively well. He didn't understand their anxieties in a shrinking economic world, nor the very similar apprehensions of the local Italians. He had come down hard on the favorite illusion of the stone-hearted, all those welfare cheats. But that, it turns out, wasn't quite what the blue-collar ethnics wanted.

The Democratic voters of Massachusetts have fooled themselves again. They've designated as their candidate for governor Edward J. King, a right-wing charlatan who, reaffirming his pledges to cut taxes by God knows how many percent, has announced that he'll try now to moderate his image. The domesticated Democratic party liberals—the party *über alles* types—are encouraged by these moderating noises. We've all learned to live with trimmers, even those who announce to us that that's what they are. There was one other candidate in the race: Barbara Ackermann, special candidate of the Cambridge Brattle Street Brahmins and Brombergs. She never had a chance, and probably shouldn't have, even though most of the dense concentration of *TNR* contributors and subscribers in those parts probably voted for her. In the gubernatorial primary, Massachusetts Democrats had no satisfactory choice. More people, maybe even enough, would have voted for Dukakis—the "Duke," he's called, in deference to his arrogance—had he just a trifle above zero talent for interpersonal relations.

It's part of the liberal abandonment of politics to magnify the bad news and ignore the good. In the Democratic contest for Senator Edward Brooke's seat, someone out of the ranks of the commonwealth's most liberal regions, US Representative Paul Tsongas, came in first. Secretary of State Paul Guzzi, a man at least as desirable as the victor, came in second. State Representative Elaine Noble, a gay rights activist and good on just about everything else, polled credibly. Put their tallies together, and Massachusetts is overwhelmingly the same Massachusetts that was the only state to give its electoral votes to George McGovern in 1972. Now that's something.

On the Republican side, Senator Edward Brooke survived a challenge from Avi Nelson, a well-financed facile radio personality who staked his basic claim less on his opponent's personal problems than on what he hoped would be a majority coalition of the fearful. To the squeezed white ethnics of Boston he flashed every conceivable racist signal; to the Jews he articulated a policy on Israel that might have even embarrassed the ultra-zealots in Menachem Begin's own party; for the rich and that part of the deluded middle class that sees its better destinies linked to the GOP, he did the by-now familiar tax-cut gambit. It didn't help him a bit. He'll be doing late-night radio talk shows again, not much of a contribution to the public weal but a great relief for insomniacs. Brooke is not exactly a liberal dreamboat, but he surely was *the* liberal in this race—assuredly more than Dukakis was in his—and he won. This victory came despite the collusion between his wife and his daughter and *The Boston Globe* to compound his more ordinary political difficulties with his personal humiliations. The Massachusetts Republicans refused to turn in a black senator for a very coarse know-nothing.

Indubitably there has been some erosion of liberal sentiment in Massachusetts. This is often blamed on the Catholics, who constitute a huge bloc, or congeries of blocs, in the voting public. It has been argued, mostly by people who made single issue politics routine, that the politics of Catholics has become single-focus or at least riveted on what is subsumed under the term "the social issue." The death penalty is one aspect of this, but what seems to dominate and define the bitter, now quite ideologized, conflict is abortion. What is largely forgotten is that until the abortion controversy emerged, the Catholics of Massachusetts, however alienated they might have been from more affluent suburban liberals on matters of lifestyle, formed the quiet but indispersible electoral base for liberal politics in the commonwealth. Even today, there are a growing number of Catholics, radical Catholics, too, identifying themselves with the boldest and most progressive causes such as Fair Share, a Massachusetts bi-racial alliance against the big interests. Yes, of course, many Catholics, like many others, have been enchanted by the Proposition 13 fantasy. But what is fast pushing them out of the liberal coalition is that the official liberal voices express contempt for their feelings about abortion, a matter of great moral weight to them—in fact, a selfless issue of conscience. One does not have to agree with their sentiment to respect its ethical seriousness. Mike Dukakis had little empathy in this regard, empathy not being his forte in any event. (To be fair, one must recognize that the "pro-life" forces have sometimes encouraged their opponents to intolerance by their own intolerance and rage.)

What was true in Massachusetts was also the case in Minnesota. There US Representative Donald Fraser, a quintessential House liberal leader with a good many stripes on his sleeve, went down to defeat before a multi-millionaire opportunist, Robert Short, now playing the right-wing game to the hilt. On domestic issues, certainly, this is a defeat for the twin wings of Minnesota liberalism, one associated with Eugene McCarthy and one with Hubert Humphrey. Again what occurred was a defection of Catholics within the Democratic party to its more conservative pole. In Minnesota, also, liberalism had confidently assumed the continuous support of the Catholics, and lost it. In Fraser's case his foreign policy views, widely perceived as indiscriminately soft, may have contributed to his

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loss.

In both states extenuating circumstances, which could however become standard, should keep us from seeing these losses as a defeat for general liberal aims. Indeed, to the extent that there have been defections from established liberal candidates toward the tawdry salesmen of a fast tax kickback for everybody, these defections represent deep-seated disappointments and expectations which conservatism in its icy views of human need and human expectation can not possibly meet. The people will not be able to eat public austerity.

What liberals need to do is to reaffirm their vision of the possibilities of public policy. Without that, there is no liberalism worthy of the name. Past strategies certainly will have to be scrutinized but not as Senator McGovern, in his fashionable panic, said, because liberals have a special responsibility—or does he mean guilt?—for what has happened. There has never really been, as George Meany has been reminding us, an authentic liberal challenge to the corrosive effects of price inflation. Not that his wage demands aren't inflationary; they are. But when in recent years has government really tried to keep prices down? Even when it has proclaimed that as its intention, it has moved timidly. A liberal program never has really had a chance. And it won't have one if liberal members of Congress continue to repudiate their commitment to tax reform and replace it by what *TNR* called some weeks ago, "alms for the rich."

Some seem to think that one way of impeding the liberal retreat is by acts of political psychodrama. That's exactly what it was when the congressional black caucus had its shouting match with President Carter and Vice President Mondale last week. So John Conyers walked out and Ron Dellums delivered himself of some inflammatory language. Who cares and who's impressed? That's not serious politics for liberals, black or white. Incantations about the toothless Humphrey-Hawkins bill are only marginally more progressive than invectives against it.

Umbrella Cover-up

Umbrellas tend to be transitory items, left behind in department stores and restaurants, so one is naturally suspicious of a person who holds on to the same umbrella for 15 years. Louie Steven Witt (why does everyone connected with the Kennedy assassination have three names?) brandished just such an umbrella before the House Assassinations Committee last week. It was the same umbrella he had carried with him onto the grassy knoll in Dallas near where President Kennedy was shot. Committee investigators wanted to know whether the umbrella was really a concealed dart gun, or if it perhaps was used as a signaling device for other presidential assassins lurking in the bushes.

Witt denied everything, of course, but we recommend that the committee look carefully at the evidence before eliminating him from all suspicion. Umbrellas, after all, make superior murder weapons, as we now know from the case of Georgi Markov. According to published reports, Markov, a Bulgarian exile and Radio Free Europe broadcaster, was stabbed in the leg by "a man wielding a poisoned umbrella" on a London street September 7 and died four days later of blood poisoning. Scotland Yard is investigating; they've called in a germ warfare expert and are on the lookout for a

Umbrellas have played a pivotal role in great events throughout history.

The Bettmann Archive

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suspicious-looking umbrella on the arm of a Bulgarian spy. Markov, it seems, had been offending Bulgarian officials with his loud denunciations of them over the radio.

Witt appears to be a quieter fellow, but nevertheless admits that he appeared with an umbrella at Dealey Plaza in Dallas that sunshiny November 22 for reasons other than impending rain. Witt never liked President Kennedy much, so he brought his umbrella as a protest; apparently Kennedy detractors in Arizona had held an umbrella-in some weeks earlier. The umbrella was supposed to remind the president of his father's close ties to former British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, whose trademark was the umbrella.

Witt's testimony, although highly comical, failed to satisfy the committee entirely. A staffer opened the umbrella to further examine it for concealed equipment; she found none. Witt dismissed the entire affair as a case of being "in the wrong place at the wrong time doing the wrong thing." Why then did he wait 15 years to come forward? Why has the committee let this valuable witness leave, just on the verge of a possible breakthrough? Why did he hold on to that umbrella for 15 long years? Perhaps Scotland Yard should be called in. The British, after all, know much more about umbrellas than we do.

Pretenders to the Throne

Alexander The Great

Lisbon

President Carter's success at Camp David has boosted his prestige in Europe as well as at home, but some European defense officials still would like to add a new and possibly shocking name to presidential speculation in the US. It is that of General Alexander Haig, who is remembered by most Americans, if at all, as President Nixon's final-days White House chief of staff. For the past four years Haig has been the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, and a popular, highly respected one at that. Having done a good job over here, Haig now seems bored with duties involving merely the defense of Europe, which he doesn't think will be attacked anyway. He is preoccupied with global geopolitics, but apparently frustrated that no path seems to be open for him to become a practicing global geopolitician.

Haig denies any thoughts of returning home to run for president or anything else. But he cuts a dashing figure that would delight any media manager and he is an exponent of hard-line foreign policy views that seem to be winning favor in the US. When Richard Nixon was incapacitated by Watergate, Haig virtually ran the US government in Nixon's name. It would be out of character for him not to want to run it in his own. No other Republican has a secure lock on the party's nomination, and so it wouldn't be surprising if some would-be kingmaker were to fly over and try to convince Haig that it all could be put together. It seems ridiculous to think that it could be, but that is what Jimmy Carter's mother once thought, too.

The idea of Haig someday becoming leader of the free world is not exactly a subject of street corner conversation all over Europe. But it is enthusiastically discussed by military officers, civilian defense officials and NATO diplomats. They credit Haig with awakening their governments (and his own) to the Soviet threat to the East, and with laying the foundation for the agreement by NATO heads of state to increase their defense budgets by three percent per year. The actual proposal came from President Carter, but the Europeans say Haig was the one without whom it never would have been made or accepted.

Haig is not bashful about claiming—or implying at least—that credit is due him. "Let us review the situation as I found it four years ago," he said at the opening of a press conference I attended in Northern Germany while observing pieces of a 60,000-man allied military maneuver. "As I travelled from capital to capital, including Washington, there was a general atmosphere of complacency and even some disagreement whether a threat existed at all." Haig appeared at this press conference wearing tailored combat fatigues and sporting a spiffy raised-eagle belt buckle that no GI would be permitted to wear. He spoke into a microphone connected to a machine that both amplified his remarks and tape-recorded them for posterity. "It was clear then," he continued, "that Warsaw Pact forces had been the beneficiaries of four to five percent increases in defense spending each year for the past 15," while spending in the West had declined. East bloc investment produced "a profound change—a maturation of the military-industrial complex supporting the Soviet war machine," rendering it capable of turning out "high quality and high quantities of hardware across the full spectrum" of military equipment. He reviewed the key Soviet advances making up what now-alerted westerners refer to as the "massive Soviet buildup." But he said it was not until May 1977—at NATO's London summit—that the West decided on steps to redress the balance. This was, he said, "the most optimistic development of my tenure." Only in answer to a later question did he allow that "I do not feel exclusively responsible for the progress we've made."

As matters stand now, Warsaw Pact troops outnumber NATO forces in north and central Europe by 945,000 to 630,000. Moving in reinforcements is easier for Russia than for the US, which will have to ferry its men across the Atlantic. Counting in-place troops and reserves, Communist divisions available for combat in central Europe number 177 to NATO's 71. The Pact has about 3000 tactical aircraft on the central front, to

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NATO's 1600. Reinforcement from the US in a pre-war crisis would make the numbers about equal, but the West no longer can assume automatic advantages in air technology and performance, though the very latest US planes still are better than those of the Soviets. In tanks, the other side has a three-to-one advantage. The West now has huge numbers of anti-tank weapons, but some experts think the Soviets can counter them with massive blankets of fire from artillery. The Soviets are ahead four-to-one in that category.

In December, NATO will complete its latest five-year projection of the military balance. It is expected to conclude that the West's decision to spend more will prevent existing gaps from getting any wider, assuming the Soviets do not decide to spend more too. But NATO has other chronic problems. The Warsaw Pact's equipment is all Soviet-made or Soviet-designed, whereas the 14 countries of NATO all have equipped themselves independently, often putting economic or political considerations ahead of military ones. One country's ammunition won't fit another's weapons. The allies' radios often can't communicate with one another. Trading spare parts is impossible and sometimes so is sharing fuel. Haig actually commands only Americans until war breaks out.

The NATO allies also have different deployment doctrines. NATO strategy calls for positioning troops as close to the East German border as possible, but the Dutch, for example, have only 6000 soldiers in Germany and 68,000 back in Holland. Belgium, instead of moving more troops forward, is calling a division home after realizing that some Belgian soldiers have been in Germany as long as 25 years and many have married German women and are raising German-speaking children. Reviewing all the problems of the alliance, one German officer declared that NATO is such a mess, the only thing that will save it in a war is the responsibility of the soldiers to disobey their orders.

No one knows for sure who'd win a war if it occurred. The Soviets as attackers would need more hardware than the NATO defenders. The Russians can't be sure their allies, who are also their captives, won't start shooting at them if the going gets rough. A great deal depends on how much warning time the West gets before an attack, how quickly Western political leaders respond with orders to mobilize and how fast reinforcements can be sent. Haig is credited by the Europeans with striving to improve NATO's military reaction time, and to get allied forces working in concert, though some of his devices also have run into criticism. On his own, Haig has got NATO armies working on a program to overcome the alliance's garrison mentality and improve combat readiness, rationalize the plans of the separate forces and speed the arrival of reinforcements. He calls it the "three Rs." He also has expanded the size and sophistication of joint NATO maneuvers, which this Autumn will involve a total of 323,000 men in several separate operations. The maneuvers lately have been criticized by Socialist leaders in Germany, including the deputy defense minister, as provocative, potentially damaging to detente and injurious to negotiations between East and West Germany. There also has been grumbling that the exercises are too expensive and are advertisements for General Haig. (To make it clear, Haig had nothing to do with my visit to the exercises, which seemed provocative to me only in revealing NATO's weaknesses.)

Partly as a result of Haig's initiatives, NATO has agreed to a long-term defense program, officially adopted at the alliance's Washington summit in June, to upgrade preparedness, modernize weaponry and improve cooperation among the allies. Even so, Haig judges NATO's conventional warfare capability as being at the bottom edge of prudence. He says he is not satisfied that the West has a credible conventional deterrent, meaning it is likely that a Communist attack would have to be fought with nuclear weapons. Even here, though, the old US superiority is degraded. A special worry is the deployment of Soviet SS-20s—3000-kilometer missiles specially stationed to hit European targets. US tactical nuclear weapons, except those carried in planes, are of such short range that they might well be captured or destroyed at the outset of combat, before any decision could be reached whether to fire them. NATO nuclear planners are still talking about the best way to respond to the new Soviet missiles—with Europe-based cruise missiles or a new medium-range rocket.

Many Europeans, especially West Germans, worry that President Carter will reach a strategic arms agreement with the Soviets before they have developed a new Europe-based deterrent. They like the idea of detente, they like the idea of SALT agreements and they like Carter's declared dedication to the defense of Europe. At the same time, one high-level British diplomat said that Carter's decisions against the B-1 bomber and the neutron bomb make people like him wonder what Carter's positions will be tomorrow. A Dutch defense official said Carter makes too many mistakes. A Belgian colonel added that Carter believes too much of what the Russians tell him.

None of these officials has any such doubts about Haig. Clearly Haig is welcome among Europe's defense establishment and there remains plenty of useful work to be done at Supreme Headquarters Allied Command Europe (SHAPE) to improve the West's war-fighting capability. But Haig does not believe there will be a war in Europe because deterrence remains viable and the risks outweigh whatever the Soviets might hope to gain. The real Soviet challenge, Haig believes, lies in places like Afghanistan, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and Africa—places regrettably far from his area of responsibility.

You can tell by the tone of Haig's voice that he's much

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more aroused by actual Communist advances in South Yemen than by potential ones into Schleswig-Holstein. You have to read between his lines only a little to conclude that he does not think the Carter administration is doing enough to blunt the global Soviet challenge. "I frequently wonder how we in the West, in our search for detente, seldom deal with Soviet interference based on force of arms," he says. "Open involvement and illegal action by the Soviet Union led to changes in government in Yemen and Afghanistan," he says. A pattern has developed. The Soviets quietly build or take over a national liberation movement, then it calls for help from a Soviet satellite which intervenes more patently to overthrow the existing government. Once that is done, Haig thinks, the "Brezhnev Doctrine" applies, permitting open Soviet intervention in a socialist state. What should be done? "There should be a greater concertion [sic] to insure that the collective political, economic and security strengths [of the West] are displayed in ways to show the Soviets that these third-world intrusions are just as unacceptable as aggressive activity here [in Germany]." He hastens to add, "I am not suggesting interventionism. Far from it. We've all experienced what unfortunate results that can lead to." Haig urgently does not want to be considered some kind of hawk, beating the table in a repeat of the horrors of the 1960s.

Well, specifically what should the US do about Soviet activities? Make strong statements? No. "Precisely the opposite of making strong statements. My experience, at the highest levels of government, tells me that this is an area not to be covered by rhetoric." Rather, "By hard policies—interface policies, resource policies, security policies . . . by the application of will in areas where we are vastly superior." I assume he means that the US should use "linkage," tying SALT and grain sales to Soviet behavior on other fronts. But Haig would not be drawn into such specific discussion.

Does he feel that the West has shown a lack of will? "I've never been concerned about the West's political will. I have been concerned with the West's political confusion—confusion about Soviet threats and the means to meet them." Does he think the Soviets sense weakness in the American administration? "I never indulge in value judgments of the American administration," he says. I do not see how Haig can stay much longer at his NATO post when his interest is so intensely focused elsewhere. He is too formidable a figure, and too much a "political general" to be trusted by any administration as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is an empty role nowadays anyway. Politics would seem his only opportunity—perhaps by way of a university presidency, in the manner of the first SHAPE commander, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

It won't be as easy for Haig as it was for Ike. Haig does do everything he can to portray himself as a "soldier's general." He visits, eats and joshes with US troops at every opportunity, and often gets his picture taken doing so. But being head of a peacetime European volunteer force of 200,000 Americans is far less politically potent than commanding a wartime contingent of millions. Haig seems stuck without a base. He has little name recognition back home. He has no domestic program. He may be the man who engineered Nixon's resignation, but he also defended Nixon and helped him try to wriggle free of his pursuers. Haig steadfastly refuses to talk about his Watergate experiences, but no one with any sense ought to vote for him without some explanation of what his role really was. Haig does have good political attributes. He's obviously smart, experienced and ambitious. He's lean and fit, looks taller than he is and has "presence." He performs well on television, though he has a tendency to use words that don't exist ("disconglomeration" is one, meaning disruption) and to answer questions at too great a length. He also shows signs of disingenuousness—claiming, for example, that NATO maneuvers provide adequate drill in urban warfare when actually they afford next to none. Maybe Haig will be offered a cabinet post if a Republican gets elected president, but I doubt if that will satisfy his ambition. He says he has not planned or thought about his future. But if that's true, it would be the first time.

Morton Kondracke

White House Watch

Mideast Choo Choo

President Carter in late September was full of himself, as the saying goes, and he had a right to be. He was enjoying success for a change, on a scale he hadn't known since his election. More than a week after the summit meeting at Camp David with Prime Minister Begin of Israel and President Sadat of Egypt ended, he and they were still on the track toward a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt and, perhaps years away but nonetheless a hitherto incredible prospect, general peace between Israel and its other Arab enemies.

Once the first euphoric phase was past, Carter affected a modesty so extreme that he seemed to discourage admiration. "We had a good success," was the most he said to visiting editors on September 22. "When things go wrong," he said the next day in Columbus, Ohio, "the President gets too much blame. And when things go right, the President gets too much credit." It was a passing fit. He spoke on the same political trip of "the remarkable results of Camp David" and said that "we made great progress forward toward

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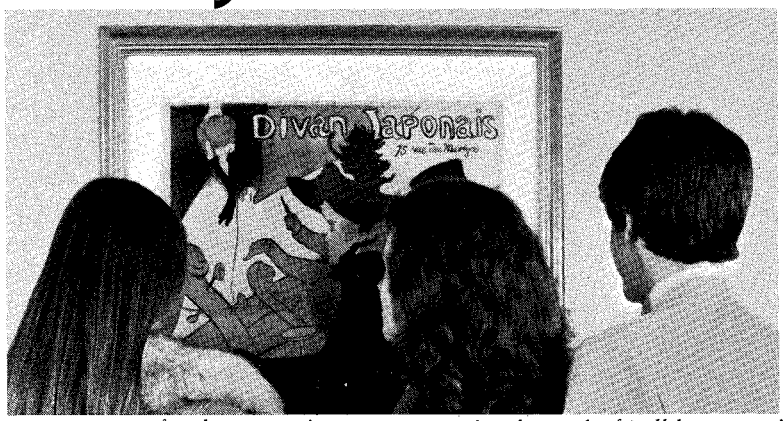

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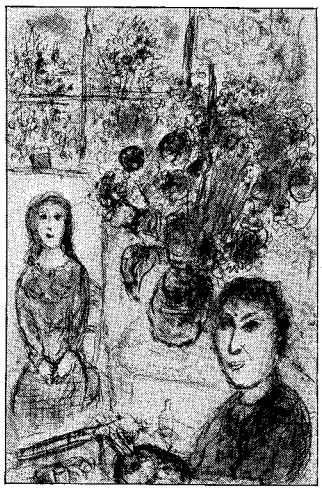
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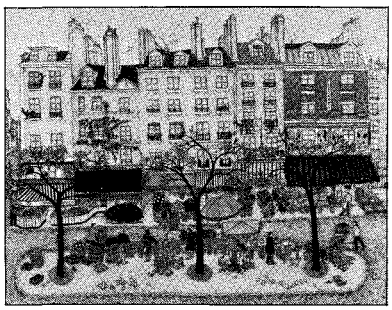
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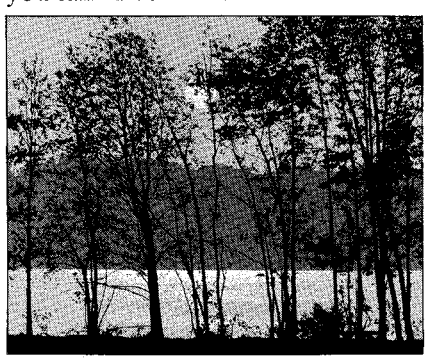
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world peace." At a White House breakfast with Washington journalists on September 27, he avoided grandiloquence but injected himself into a dispute with Prime Minister Begin that involved his and Begin's credibility and vanity. Serious issues that could affect the outcome of the Camp David accords were also involved. But, in the official State Department view and in the view of some of Carter's people, the argument had already been carried to absurd and damaging lengths by Carter assistants. The President's belated personal participation in it was really quite odd.

The dispute had to do with whether and under what restrictions new Israeli civilian settlements were to be established on the Arab West Bank after the Camp David "framework" agreements take effect. The details were set forth here in a previous report and will not be restated. It is enough to note that Begin said afterward, in the US and to his parliament at home, that he did not agree to terms and restrictions that Carter said he did agree to. Carter assistants, mainly Press Secretary Jody Powell and national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, infuriated Begin by showing reporters a memorandum account of the West Bank discussion at Camp David, signed "Jimmy Carter," which in the White House view verified Carter's recollection and disproved Begin's. My reading of the memo is that it comes closer to verifying Begin's recollection than Carter's.

In any case, a believable Israeli story is that Begin and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance had agreed in a farewell conversation that neither government would publicize the dispute before Begin got home, checked the Israeli record and restated his understanding in a letter to Carter. Begin yakked about it, and he yakked plenty, only after Carter assistants had passed the Carter memo around and encouraged reporters to think it proved what it didn't prove. The best commentaries on the White House campaign to promote the Carter version, no matter what harm it might do to Begin's vital undertaking to get parliamentary (Knesset) approval of the accords, came from a principal instigator and executor of the campaign, Brzezinski, and from Secretary Vance's chief spokesman at the State Department, Hodding Carter III. Brzezinski, challenged on ABC television to explain and justify the American version, confessed that "we" had disclosed the theoretically confidential Carter memo and then said: "I don't think any useful service can be rendered by me trying to unravel some of the negotiating history in order to discuss this issue much further." When the subject was raised at a State Department news briefing, Hodding Carter said: "We have taken our position on this and I am not in any position to change it. But I'm also not in any position to do the game that was being danced all over the world, apparently, last week." His hearers understood that he was referring to "the game . . . being danced" at the White House.

After these things had been said, and after Begin had staked much of his argument before the Knesset on the truth of his version, Carter went out of his way to say on September 27 that Begin had "actually agreed" to conditions that differed importantly from the conditions to which Begin said he had agreed. The most important difference was whether proposals to establish new settlements after an introductory period would be subject to Arab veto. The veto could be cast by Egypt, by elected representatives of resident Palestinian Arabs or by Jordan if it joined the others in negotiating "the final status" of the West Bank and the adjoining Gaza Strip during an agreed transition period of five years. The essential emptiness of the argument over future settlements, and the fatuity of Carter's personal intervention in it, were demonstrated in a statement that Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan made at the Ben Gurion Airport when he returned from Camp David. Dayan said: "Let us not delude ourselves. I have no doubt that when we enter into deliberations with the other three parties concerning what is to happen in the areas in the five years of transition, this question will come up and will be discussed *and agreement will have to be reached* on this subject." Absent agreement "between the parties," in short, there will be no new Israeli settlements. So Carter intends. So Dayan says. So Begin has refused to say but has not denied.

The settlements question was one of many that fascinated fans of conflict and addicts to doubt. Will King Hussein of Jordan finally accept the accords and accept the central role in the Camp David process that Carter confidently assigned to him? It seems doubtful at this writing, but Carter, Begin, Sadat—that fantastic trio!—may prove right in believing that he must and eventually will. Have Carter's and the US's Saudi Arabian friends decided, as reported, to show their displeasure with Sadat for plunging off on his own by cutting off military aid to Egypt? The one important assurance that Secretary Vance extracted from the Saudis in Riyadh was that, at least for now, they won't do anything to pull the rug from under Sadat. These and similar questions pale in importance by comparison with a result of the Camp David summit that is not open to question. Jim Hoagland, a *Washington Post* reporter who specializes on the Middle East, stated the point as follows:

"Sadat at last has an American President where he has always wanted him, squarely in the middle, as committed to arguing an Arab case as an Israeli case and morally obliged to up the ante needed to keep Sadat and the (Camp David) agreement afloat."

This is something that is more likely to be said in private at the Egyptian Embassy than at the White House or State Department. But the essential truth of it is behind the previously recounted White House campaign to commit Begin in the West Bank settlements matter to what Sadat and all Arabs want to

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hear. It is behind the hope and possibility discussed by Carter, Vance, Brzezinski, Begin, Sadat that the interim civilian Arab "authority" intended to replace the Israeli military government on the West Bank and Gaza Strip may work so well, become so acceptable to the Israelis, that during or after the transition it could become the permanent authority or maybe even a recognized "government" over the area. At the White House when the Camp David "framework" agreements were signed, Carter displayed pride and pleasure when Sadat said to him: "The continuation of your active role is indispensable. We need your help and the support of the American people." Sadat threatened or pretended to threaten—Brzezinski said on television that he wasn't sure which—to desert the Camp David conference the Friday before the Sunday it ended. Carter persuaded him to stay. How? Neither Carter nor Sadat has said. A reasonable supposition is that Carter promised Sadat to continue the "active role," provide the American "help and support" that Sadat requires and clearly expects.

Brzezinski was asked by an interviewer whether he wasn't saying to all Arabs and particularly to King Hussein and the Palestinians, "Gentlemen, the train has left the station and maybe you better get on board." Brzezinski, never one to pass up a quibble, said it wasn't really fair to put it that way. But: "I would say that the process has started moving. We feel that it is in the interests of all the parties that moderate Arabs participate in that process as early as possible. We hope that they will join it early rather than late."

John Osborne

On the Hill

Vying to be Sugar Daddy

The White House and Congress are locked in combat over an issue that might be depicted as a battle between the haves and the have-nots. The trouble is, no one is taking the side of the have-nots. The fight is about sugar. The White House wants to protect domestic sugar producers and a handful of corporations engaged in sugar processing. The debate is not over the president's desire, but over the degree of his ardor. His rivals, such as senators Russell Long and Frank Church, think that whatever the administration wants to do to help the US sugar industry, it isn't enough. Long and Church, whose states harbor a lot of sugar producers, are old hands at running errands for Big Sugar. Because of these more zealous suitors, Carter's own efforts have managed only to make him a new group of enemies out of the ungrateful beneficiaries of federal sugar programs.

Since he took office, Carter has been pressing for an International Sugar Agreement to govern world sugar trade. Its ostensible purpose is to prevent wild swings in sugar prices by use of reserve "buffer" stocks that would accumulate during periods of oversupply, to raise prices, and deplete during periods of undersupply, to lower them. So far 72 countries have signed the pact, including the United States. The Senate must ratify the agreement, however, and that is where Carter has run into problems. Frank Church is chairman of the subcommittee that has jurisdiction over the sugar treaty, and until he gets what he wants, the ISA will be held hostage. What he wants is higher sugar prices to be achieved through higher tariffs on imports and, if necessary (very likely), import quotas. Right now the world market price for raw sugar is about eight cents a pound. About six cents of import duty raises the US cost of imported sugar—and thus the price domestic producers can demand for their sugar as well—to about 14 cents a pound. Church's own bill would increase tariffs and quotas to push the US price to 17 cents a pound for raw sugar and 21½ cents for refined sugar, increasing to about 21 and 26½ cents, respectively, by 1982. But the Senate won't do anything until the House finishes its wrangling over its own two sugar bills. One, passed by the Agricultural Committee, sets the raw sugar price at 16 cents, to be increased every three months. Another, approved by the Ways and Means Committee, sets the price at 15 cents with no built-in increase. Originally the White House wanted to set the price objective at 14½ cents, but now it regards the Ways and Means bill as the only realistic hope.

Governments throughout the world have been fixing sugar prices for decades. Since 1937, world sugar trade has been covered by four successive multinational agreements, but most of it falls under bilateral "preference arrangements." From 1948 to 1974, US trade was regulated by the Sugar Act, which established import quotas and gave subsidies to domestic producers. With the precipitous rise of sugar prices in 1974—at one point raw sugar cost 64.5 cents a pound—Congress let the Sugar Act expire. American sugar producers didn't mind this very much until world prices dropped sharply in 1975. The increased production stimulated by the 1974 boom has kept sugar prices stubbornly low since then. In May 1977, Congress extended some help to sugar producers in the form of a price support of 13.5 cents. The way this works is that sugar producers who wish to do so may put their sugar in government warehouses and receive a "loan" from the government of money equal to the support price. If the market price stays below the support price, the government forgets about the loan and keeps the sugar. If the price rises above the support price, the producer takes his sugar back, sells it and pays off the loan. In effect, the government prevents sugar from

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dipping below the support price by standing ready to buy it at that price.

In November 1977 President Carter invoked the other most common price rigging technique. He added three cents to the duties imposed on imported sugar, thus raising the price of sugar to 14 cents a pound.

Now there comes the third layer of price protection: the International Sugar Agreement. The ISA is an effort to establish a worldwide sugar cartel. Its principal purpose is to restrict sugar supplies in order to keep world prices up in a range from 11 to 21 cents. When private corporations do this sort of thing, it is called "restraint of trade" and is the object of vigorous federal prosecution and noisy denunciations. When governments do it, it is called "promoting price stability." Those countries that export sugar, most of which are poor nations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, favor the agreement because they expect it to protect them from the low prices that prevail today. Those that import sugar, like the United States, figure that the new system will help their own producers, never mind the cost to consumers.

If the agreement works as it's supposed to, its long-run result will be to raise sugar prices. This is no surprise, since sugar producers have no interest in lowering them. The theory behind the ISA—or at least the one offered to the public—is that over time, the net effect on prices will be minimal. Using buffer reserves is supposed to do nothing more than modulate the peaks and troughs characteristic of sugar's volatile trade cycle. Stability, it should be noted, also was the alleged purpose of the Sugar Act that expired in 1974, but the price of the stability was high. During the period 1963-71, US sugar prices averaged nearly 25 percent higher than those in Canada, which imposed no import quotas and relatively low tariffs. There is no reason to believe the ISA would work any better.

For better or worse, though, the ISA probably will break down soon enough. As long as the agreement holds out the prospect of getting and maintaining higher world sugar prices, the signatories will abide by it. The danger comes when supplies either shrink or grow rapidly. If they sense a glut coming on, with its accompanying depressed prices, sugar producers are likely to abandon the agreement and sell at the best price they can get. On the other hand, if bad weather or other natural calamities substantially reduce supplies, sugar producers aren't likely to settle for the ISA price when buyers are willing to pay much more. Coffee was covered by an international agreement when a frost destroyed much of the Brazilian coffee crop in 1975. The agreement quickly disintegrated as sellers scrambled to make a killing. In July 1975 coffee was selling on the world market for 60 cents a pound; by April 1977 it had climbed to $3.33 a pound. A 1975 International Trade Commission study of international commodity agreements succinctly explained their central flaw: "Historically, buffer stocks have failed to maintain price ceilings, but they have had somewhat more success in preserving floor prices." In other words, they're good for protecting producers but not for protecting consumers.

The International Sugar Agreement won't give developing nations that export sugar the help they really need. It may even hurt them. In the short run, it will raise their revenues by increasing the selling price of their sugar. But it does nothing to undo the restrictions placed on imports by advanced countries like the US and those in the Common Market. Furthermore, costs of sugar production are generally lowest in the developing nations and highest in the industrialized ones. This means that in a free market, sugar producers in Brazil and Mexico would be able to undersell those in the US and Western Europe. In a genuinely competitive market, third-world countries would produce far more of the world's sugar. The ISA effectively strips them of their biggest advantage, enabling higher-cost producers to operate on an equal footing. If a cartel holds all prices at an artificially high level, sugar buyers have no reason to prefer cheaper producers to more expensive ones.

The principal beneficiaries of both the International Sugar Agreement and any price support increase will be those Americans involved in growing and processing sugar cane and sugar beets, just as they have benefited from past sugar legislation. For the most part, these are not small family farmers but large corporate conglomerates and agricultural cooperatives. Only about 14,000 out of America's six million farmers grow sugar. In Hawaii, a prime area for cane growing, 14 firms own all the sugar fields.

The lobbying on these sugar bills offers some interesting glimpses into American interest-group politics. Sugar growers and processors naturally want higher prices. From their point of view, the best way to get them is to increase duties on imports. Price support payments tend to blacken the image of the recipients, particularly when they are as large as those paid to sugar interests. So far this year the Department of Agriculture has made price support payments to only 63 firms, but the average payment has been over one million dollars. Some processors received more than $20 million. That's bad for public relations. Supporting prices by raising the price of imports would have precisely the same effect, but the windfall would be a bit less visible.

The bills to raise prices also have the support of corn refiners and farmers. Sweeteners can be made from corn, but they cost more to produce than sugar. The best way to expand sales of corn sweeteners is to prop up the prices of all sweeteners, thus eliminating sugar's natural cost advantage. The most extensive lobbying on the sugar bill has come from corn interests; sugar processors have kept a relatively low profile. Farm lobbyists generally have supported this protection for

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sugar producers. They are eager for the precedent the bills would set in shielding American farmers from foreign competition.

On the other side of the controversy are cane refiners and industrial users of sugar—such as soft-drink companies and bakeries—who will be faced with higher costs if sugar prices are forced up. Carter's close ties with the Atlanta-based Coca-Cola Company have inflamed the imaginations of his critics, who accuse him of paying off the world's largest soft-drink producer by failing to support the more extravagant sugar price support proposals. Whether or not the charge is accurate, this is one case where what's good for Coca-Cola is good for America. The typical American consumer eats nearly a hundred pounds of sugar a year. The President's Council on Wage and Price Stability calculates that the House Agriculture Committee bill would cost consumers more than $4 billion over the next five years. (The Council doesn't mention that the Ways and Means bill supported by the White House would cost consumers about $1.2 billion.) Church's bill, indisputably the worst of the bunch, carries a price tag of well over $6 billion.

These increased costs will serve no purpose but to line the pockets of producers of sugar and other sweeteners. There is no good reason for the US government to spur inflation in order to prop up an industry badly pressed by foreign competitors. Protection of the domestic sugar industry can't be justified on the familiar rationale offered by steel and petroleum companies, that it is vital to national defense and thus should be kept alive in case war should cut off supplies from abroad. That leaves no reasonable justification but political expedience for a president who once promised to replace Ralph Nader as the nation's principal consumer advocate and who recently railed against organized groups for frustrating his anti-inflation efforts: "The fight against inflation becomes nearly impossible when the pressures of special economic interest lobbyists are successful. These lobbyists care absolutely nothing about the national interest—as long as they get theirs." Jimmy Carter was right then. Both he and Congress are wrong now. Ralph Nader's title is secure.

Stephen Chapman

Stephen Chapman is a Washington writer.

The Camp David summit killed off Nasserism for good.

The New Arab World

by David Pryce-Jones

Historic times. A text now exists, duly signed by both parties, committing Egypt and Israel "to negotiate in good faith with a goal of concluding within three months . . . a peace treaty between them." Even if the next three months abort, as is possible but not probable in the circumstances, there can be no going back on the fact that an Israeli prime minister and an Egyptian president together have created the outlines of political agreement between their respective countries.

"To negotiate in good faith. . . ." There rises before the eyes the misty procession of laborers in this vineyard, the members of the Peel Commission, the Hope-Simpson and Crane-King and Woodhead commissions, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, Count Bernadotte and Gunnar Jarring and forgotten worthies all who strove for good faith and, God help them, found it wanting. If good faith had been there, if humanity in distress had been met with a helping hand, the whole Arab-Jewish tangle need never have produced the miserable past history that preceded Camp David. Until now, endurance alone has seemed to be the deciding factor between Arabs and Jews.

In 1967, as a result of a miscalculation of forces by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Arab territory was placed in Israeli hands and suddenly the possibility of a tradeoff was created. It was King Hussein of Jordan who apparently discovered the formula that Israel could

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either have peace or territory, but not both. Negotiating in good faith is a long step away from plain enduring. Until President Sadat no Arab leader has been prepared to take the practical steps needed to reverse the consequences of 1967, and therefore the Israelis have been left the field to dig in. Now the Camp David agreement effectively returns Sinai to its pre-1967 condition, but demilitarized. The bargain, as struck now, serves the national interests of Egypt and Israel, disadvantaging neither. But by the simple act of promoting Egyptian national interest, the agreement does amount to victory for President Sadat—not over Menachem Begin, but over the ghost of Gamal Abdel Nasser. That is a wonderful achievement, and may be significant for the whole world. Realism has defeated rhetoric, national interests have taken precedence over propaganda. Unlike Nasser, Sadat has not been delighted to cut off his nose to spite his face. For Egypt, at last, the way upward from the bottom of the pit is open. Years of public lying and deception dropped away when President Sadat had the courage to say that no more sons of Egypt would be sent to die in the desert.

For Nasser, sending Egyptians to die was an indispensable requirement for staying in power. To recap the grizzly story: having successfully plotted his *coup d'etat*, Nasser had to justify himself. There were, and are, in Egypt terrible domestic problems of overpopulation, poverty and disease which will not be solved in this century, but Nasser quickly appreciated that hard work and reform do not earn foreign aid and arms the way adventure and aggrandizement do. The cold war was a lucky historical accident for him, an occasion for cunningly bidding for and winning superior patronage. Courted by Russia and America—like Nehru, Nkrumah, Sukarno, Tito, the shameless crew of tyrants exploiting the aftermath of world war—Nasser acquired power not for the sake of those on whose behalf he purported to rule, but at their expense. National interest could follow afterward, if it followed at all.

Sadat's 1973 war was a copybook Nasserist exercise. But it almost produced the foreign occupation of Cairo, as well as the destruction of the Egyptian fighting forces. With the Israeli army to the west of the Suez Canal, disengagement agreements became an imperative national interest. To pursue them, however, was treachery according to Nasserist principles—betrayal of the Arab cause, serving Western imperialism. That Sadat learned to live so easily with these accusations proves what fantasies they are. As a matter of fact, it is quite harmless to be abused by Arab leaders whose aim is primarily the Nasserist one of personal power for themselves, coupled naturally with the obstruction of the interest of others. But still, it is not pleasant to sit in Cairo and be ringed with volatile—in some cases crazed—states such as Libya, Sudan and Ethiopia, with Syria and marxist Yemen and Iraq close enough for intrigue, and Moscow polluting the atmosphere from afar. Only Saudi financial backing has put off Egypt's day of reckoning, but petrodollars do not come free and Sadat has discovered how the legacy of Nasserism forces Egypt into the position of a client. This realization has taken him to Jerusalem and Camp David.

Geopolitics provides the main reason for Sadat's coming to terms with Israel, but his simple assertion of national interest guarantees Sadat's popularity at home. Mohammed Kamel, the foreign minister, may resign, but the rest of Cairo has let out an audible sigh of relief. The average Egyptian is charming and good humored, rightly prudent where his own skin is concerned and well able to see through Nasserist pretexts for sending him out into the desert.

This is what works upon the nerves of the so-called Rejectionist Front (which now calls itself the "Steadfastness and Confrontation Front"), lately gathered at the Sheraton Hotel in Damascus, and old-fashioned devotees of Nasserism to a man. Iraq, which rejects everything, now and probably until the end of time, and would wish Egypt and Israel and Syria in hell, was not actually represented at Damascus. Libya and Algeria were represented but neither has any real confrontation with Israel and both seek only to turn the issue to their own advantage. However much they plot, there is actually little they can do except utter ritual curses. Another plain truth is that nobody gives a fig for Syria as such, and therefore it must make the best of its one and only inexhaustible raw material, namely the fomenting of trouble. On that subject President Hafez Assad has nothing to learn. Iraq, to the east, is motivated by nothing more than a permanent case of the sulks. Lebanon, to the west, lies in ruin as the consummation of Syrian policy. To the south there is a hesitant Jordan, and Israel, which can now expect threats of blitzkrieg. To carry international clout the Syrians need to wheedle and blackmail dollars out of the oil producers and tanks out of the Russians. Neither of these necessities would be forthcoming in the event of a compromise on all frontiers and a quiet life.

The Palestine Liberation Organization ought self-evidently to embody Palestinian national interest, but in the critical years when it might have done so, in the late 1940s, it did not exist. Nasser whistled it up out of the void in Gaza during the 1960s, gave it money and a flag and a man named Ahmed Shukeiry to lead it. Shukeiry's memoirs, tragicomically entitled *Dialogues and Secrets with Kings*, reveal that the PLO has never been anything except a device whereby Arab powers-that-be can indulge in private political ends by proxy. In its 14 years of existence, the PLO has evolved from an arm of Egyptian policy into an arm of Syrian policy. The interests of Palestinians never have been a genuine consideration for its leaders. It represents Nasserism at its purest. The PLO has been drawn into civil war in Jordan and in Lebanon, into terrorism abroad, extor-

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tionism, drug-running, indeed into almost everything except organizing for the liberation of Palestine. To head the PLO today, as Yassir Arafat does, means to trot around Damascus. To be an ordinary PLO member today is like being a glorified reservist, sure of a small but regular monthly wage, with the prospect of trips and promotions and—only for the very few hotheads—a dangerous mission. This may be the good life for the boys, but it has nothing to do with the legitimate rights of Palestinians. What Nasser launched, Sadat now has turned his back on. He did not even feel the need to mention the PLO in the Camp David agreement. Where can Arafat turn in retaliation? He and Colonel Qaddafi flew to the Jordanian air base of Mafraq to confer with King Hussein, archenemy of old: that is sad slapstick on the Shukeiry level. Arafat also arranged to be photographed chatting amicably in the Sheraton with another old rival, George Habash of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, breaking off to be heard in routine abuse of America, Israel and anything else that comes to mind. It's fantasy; for the birds; in other words, for Western reporters eager for bad news. A murder costs about five dollars in this part of the world and no doubt the PLO can use Saudi or Libyan subsidies to buy some corpses. Disagreeable as this will be for the victims, even cumulative assaults upon the prominent or the innocent do not amount to a constructive independent line, which is what the PLO lacks.

This brings us to the West Bank and Gaza, which for the umpteenth time the PLO promises to devour with fire and the sword. No need to look for good faith here. But words are even cheaper than deeds. Why is it that almost every Western observer forgets this elementary truth? (The answer is that all of them are fortunate enough never to have been in fear of their lives. Therefore the imaginative effort to place themselves in the position of people like the West Bankers is too great.) Out they rush, our brilliant correspondents, and find students at Bir Zait College trembling with rage, chemists and shopkeepers and doctors denouncing Sadat for treason. How is it, one wonders, after hearing these reports, that the Israelis have managed to avoid getting blown sky high these last 10 years? In terms of action, however, a call for a general strike on the West Bank has been brushed aside, and if you want violence and sudden death you must drive up the road to nearby Beirut.

There is no way of knowing reliably what inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza really want. Public opinion, as understood in democracies with electorate and polls, does not exist. Primary devotion goes to the interests of oneself and one's dependents, extended to the family or clan, the *hamula*, then perhaps to one's village or town. Through seniority, a spokesman emerges to express whatever these private and sectarian interests may be and to deal with other interests that may be in conflict. A few score of these spokesmen or notables actually hold the West Bank in their hands: patriarchs of the Anabtawi family, for instance, and the Abdul Hadis and El Masris, Nusseibehs, Khalidis, Tuqans and Sheikh Ali Ja'abari, lately mayor of Hebron. These men control the West Bank's land, its money, its future. If they so choose, the word is given and 20 minutes later the mob is out rioting.

Israel, King Hussein and the PLO have engaged in a stiff three cornered contest for the approval and cooperation of these men. Confronted with a web of bribery, cajolery and intimidation, the notables are sensible enough to make sure that all bets are hedged. To give an illustration, when Bassam Shaqah, mayor of Nablus, spoke against the Camp David agreement, he appeared to be committing himself, and by implication Nablus and its citizens, to the PLO. The Western press fell upon this interpretation. But it is not quite so. The Shaqahs are a rich, conservative, on the whole pro-Hashemite family who are protecting themselves by having one of their figureheads pay lip service to the PLO while his uncles are in King Hussein's palace in Amman and in the antechambers of the Israeli military government as well.

Shortly before the Camp David meeting, General Dayan did the rounds of the West Bank notables. One can presume that the notables were prepared to accept Egyptian-Israeli compromise along the lines that emerged. It is in their interest to do so. The transitional five-year period envisaged for the West Bank, with corresponding reduction of the Israeli presence, can only increase the notables' power and prestige. The local residents are being invited to accept greater responsibility for themselves, a process amounting to the political squeezing out of the PLO. If the notables can add courage to their skills in maneuvering, and can be seen to be successful, the students and shopkeepers and all will take note. Then the PLO will be unable to command any allegiance on the West Bank, and its sole recourse will be to finance bomb throwing and the occasional bullet in the back. They haven't accomplished much more even under better circumstances.

The Camp David agreement posits the active participation of King Hussein. The framework text refers to delegations from Jordan, Jordanian forces in joint patrols, "representatives of Jordan to be joined by elected representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza to negotiate a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan." Can this development have come as a surprise to the King? If so, nobody in the bazaars will believe it. The framework actually gives the King little more to do than he is already doing. Hussein already pays the police and the judiciary. In effect he already decides about what the framework calls "the modalities of admission"—who gets into the West Bank—since he controls the border. If Hussein consents to the framework, he, like Sadat, will have started down the

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road to recovering what was lost in 1967. The King certainly will have to make this journey without the support of the parties who met in the Damascus Sheraton Hotel. Syria is Jordan's ally only through Nasserist expediency. One suspects that the King actually would prefer to side with Egypt. For once he seems unsure, and is said to be tired, with heart trouble and revulsion from the perpetual crisis which is his life. The agreement to disagree on Jerusalem leaves him the pretext to go into a huff whenever he likes. One problem may be that the framework text speaks of Egypt as agreeing "to the modality for establishing the elected self governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza," with an Egyptian delegation, therefore, and Egyptian officers and police physically present on the ground. This provision suggests hasty thinking. How will King Hussein take to having Egyptians do for him in Nablus and Jenin what he can do for himself? Is this a clever way of letting him off the hook with the Rejectionists or on the contrary a concealed Nasserist dodge to acquire a hold on him? The transitional five year period is certainly his to make or break. He must make an unenviably hard choice.

It is not clear what happens if Hussein fails to rise to the occasion and the Egyptian-Israeli agreement becomes a dead letter concerning all the occupied territories except the Sinai. Presumably, Gaza and the West Bank would revert to Israeli military rule. Israeli settlements would be built in earnest, and annexation would begin in all but name. Or Israel may make unilateral concessions by abolishing the military government and turning over the administration of the West Bank to the local Arab leadership. Presumably Sadat would then declare that he had done his level best, and it is not his fault if other Arab leaders fail to grasp the opportunities he created for them. For his part, he will have what he wanted. Palestinians are not one whit better off because Nasser hoped and other Arab leaders hope still to advance themselves by taking up the Palestinian cause. Everyone has been beggared in the process. Sadat has earned respect everywhere for being the first to break out of this suicidal pattern of behavior.

Not even the Saudis can prevent Sadat from acting upon his perception of reality. Nor, in all likelihood, do they want to, for all the mysterious contradictions of their public utterances. Policy-making in Riyadh is quite as impenetrable as anything that goes on in the Kremlin. The Saudis lead the Arab world in despising the Palestinians, but they also have an exaggerated fear of the Palestinians. Therefore the Saudis try to herd the Palestinians away toward a West Bank state—but not too energetically, of course, because if an autonomous Palestinian state were ever established, the Russians would be bound to exploit it. The Saudis watch Soviet imperialism closing in on them, and all they can do is open more undeclared bank accounts for the purpose of buying friends and enemies alike. They need a stable pro-Western Egypt of the kind Sadat is creating, but they would feel exposed if they were to admit it. On such frailties hangs the Western world. Meanwhile Moslems and marxists take to the streets together next door in Iran—an example to shake them to the core. Maybe it was just what was required to concentrate all the minds at Camp David.

A report on trouble brewing all over Central America

Not Just Nicaragua

by Tad Szulc

The Nicaraguan drama—still far from resolution despite the Somoza regime's brutal military victory over its own people during September—is the most visible crisis currently affecting Central America. But, as I had the opportunity to ascertain during a recent tour of the region, every republic between Colombia in the south and Mexico in the north lives in turmoil and tension. Even traditionally peaceful and democratic Costa Rica faces internal conflict, and Panama is approaching a risky power transition.

Considering how the Carter administration, notwithstanding its dedication to the observance of human

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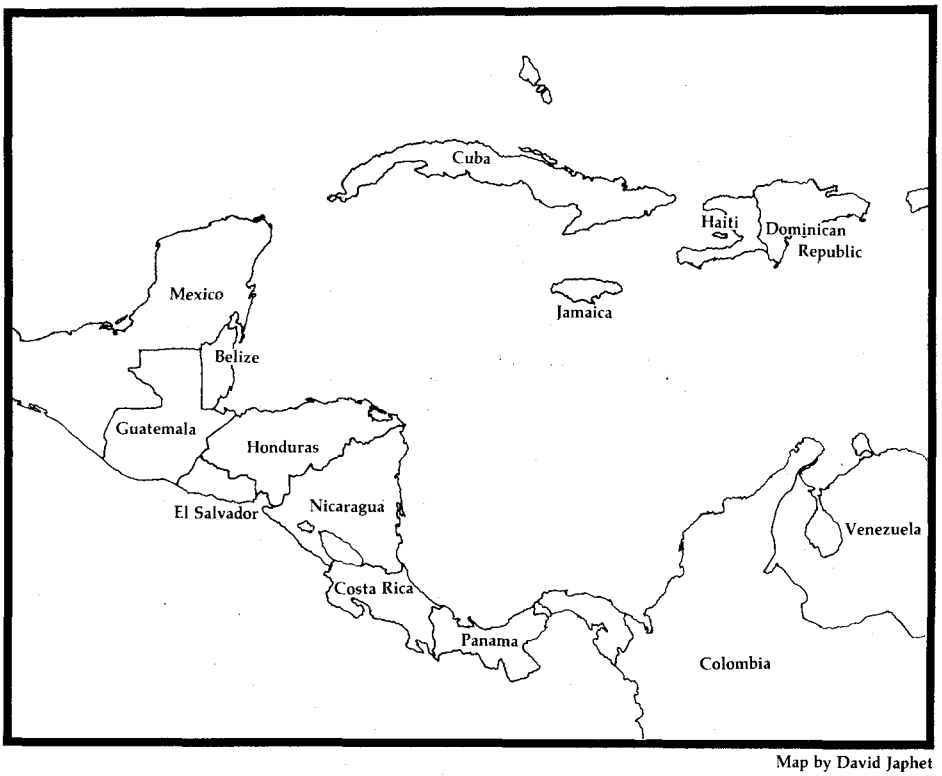
rights everywhere, has failed to credibly handle the Nicaraguan trauma, it would appear urgent to upgrade Central American priorities in Washington and to formulate clear policies before the next explosion. Traveling in Central America while Nicaragua's tragedy was in progress, this was the message I heard in every capital.

Apart from the State Department's bureau of inter-American affairs (which was being reorganized during last month's crisis and where opinions were widely divided), Nicaragua never commanded sufficient attention in the US government because nobody thought that President Anastasio Somoza Debayle was seriously vulnerable to opposition pressures. For the same reason, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, each fighting leftist guerrillas for years, remain at the bottom of the administration's list of priorities.



Map by David Japhet

No single policy can be tailored to fit all Central American situations. The problems there, however, are similar enough in most cases—dictatorships posing as elected governments being challenged by opposition forces ranging from left-wing guerrillas to the Roman Catholic Church and important segments of the middle class—to suggest that the time has come for the US to take a strong stand in favor of democracy, even if it is accused of "intervention" by the rulers in place.

In Nicaragua, the Carter administration had managed by its wavering policies to antagonize the moderate democratic opposition and the powerful leftist Sandinist Front of National Liberation on one hand as well as Somoza himself on the other. The early impact of the human rights policy, which had won the US significant new points in public opinion, now has been dissipated, and the old anti-American skepticism is reviving. The American policy goal should be to avoid a repetition of the Nicaraguan experience, which is threatened throughout Central America and even in the Caribbean. Both the validity of Carter's human rights policy and the long-range stability of this critical region are at stake.

It would be absurd, for example, to be seduced by the Somoza prophecy that a Communist takeover is the only alternative to rightist dictatorships in Central American countries. Such a prophecy could become self-fulfilling if all democratic options are removed. The kind of violence practiced by Somoza's National Guard only tends to polarize a nation and, in the end, to lead to a revolutionary solution as proposed by the Sandinist Front. It would be equally absurd to apply a domino theory to Central America: that if Nicaragua rids itself of Somoza, then all the other dictatorships will vanish. But I found everywhere the view that the outcome in Nicaragua will strengthen opposition forces elsewhere. The US should be ready for such developments.

Aside from Nicaragua, the most volatile and dangerous situation I encountered on my tour was in El Salvador, the tiny coffee and cotton-growing republic on Central America's Pacific Coast. Living under a virtual state of siege, this nation is a veritable time-bomb—demographically, socially, economically and politically.

There is incredible population pressure: there are 4.5 million inhabitants on the 8000 square miles of El Salvador's territory—about 550 per square mile. The annual birth rate is 3.3 percent, one of the highest in the world. Unemployment is about 20 percent and underemployment is 50 percent. Coffee pickers, who earn the equivalent of $2.25 a day, and cotton pickers, who get one dollar, work only one month a year during harvest time. In the last two years, the price of rice and beans—basic staples—has shot up 30 percent. Even today, it is an untenable socioeconomic situation. But the population is expected to double by the year 1990, just a decade away, and even the most conservative government officials acknowledge that before long something has to give in terms of the society's survival.

El Salvador is controlled by powerful landowner and business groups for whom the succeeding military governments are political surrogates. The regular army, three separate police forces, a large armed vigilante organization known as ORDEN—directed by the Defense Ministry and said to have 50,000 members—and a right-wing terrorist outfit calling

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itself *Unión Guerrillera Blanca* assure public order and, in effect, keep down rising peasant unrest and left-wing guerrillas. The Salvadorean establishment fears a repetition of the savage peasant uprising of 1932, and it seems as if most government policies are aimed at preventing it. In the wealthy districts of San Salvador, the country's beautiful capital, homes are surrounded by high walls and barbed wire. The rich are scared of political murders and kidnappings by the left—in the last three years *guerrilleros* have raised nearly $27 million in ransom—and everyone who counts goes armed or with bodyguards. Even policemen on bicycles carry submachineguns slung over their chests.

So there is open warfare between the right and the left. Both the former president of El Salvador's National Assembly and the dean of economics of the National University were murdered during September—the first apparently by the left and the second apparently by the right. Last year, two priests who worked with peasants were killed by rightist vigilantes. Last April, 29 peasants were killed in a firefight with the army in the town of San Pedro Perulapan, 20 miles east of the capital.

Foreign diplomats say that the behavior of the military is pushing the masses toward the left. The church is split down the middle, with the archbishop of San Salvador, Msgr. Oscar Romero y Galdames, openly siding with the opposition. He has an ally in the bishop of Santiago de Maria, but the country's four other bishops support the government.

Though he is in the minority in the church hierarchy, Archbishop Romero is El Salvador's most important political figure in opposition to the country's president, General Carlos Humberto Romero (no kin). By all accounts, the 61-year-old archbishop enjoys a vast popular following. I heard him receive massive applause after he delivered one of his fighting sermons at the San Salvador cathedral on a Sunday early in September. The regime so far has no idea how to deal with him. His sermons are rebroadcast every Sunday afternoon by a San Salvador radio station; the Social Communications Secretariat of the archbishop's office issues regular bulletins recording acts of violence against peasants, and arrests and disappearances of members of the opposition. The regime is aware that any direct action against Msgr. Romero could trigger a major wave of violence.

During a long conversation at his office, the archbishop spoke of priests being tortured by the authorities for espousing the peasants' cause. Others, he said, have been arrested for the "subversive" possession of a copy of the proclamation issued by Latin American bishops in Medellin, Colombia, two years ago in defense of social justice. "The church is not against the government," Msgr. Romero told me. "The truth is that the government is against the people and we are *for* the people."

The dispute between the archbishop and the conservative bishops centers currently on the right of Catholics to be working actively in FECCAS, a peasant federation originally sponsored by the church, but now under the influence of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR), a left-wing trade union coalition. The church conservatives oppose the involvement of Catholics in BPR; the archbishop defends it.

BPR is not known to practice political violence, but last April its militants occupied four foreign embassies and San Salvador's cathedral for 10 days in peaceful protest against arrests of the opposition. The left-wing organizations responsible for most of the political assassinations and kidnappings in El Salvador are called the People's Revolutionary Army and the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL).

President Romero, who took office in July 1977 following an election in which considerable fraud is said to have been committed, tried at first to curb right-wing repression and to undertake a program of social reform. But he has failed at both efforts. A special report on El Salvador by the London *Economist* earlier this year stressed that Romero's land taxes, intended to finance improvement of rural living standards and similar measures, "lack both the immediacy and scope of the desired land reform and they may not do much to calm the political scene for some time to come."

General Romero last year lifted the state of siege in the country and, according to US officials, made an effort to improve the protection of human rights. This led to the Carter administration's decision to support a $90 million Inter-American Development Bank loan to El Salvador to finance dam construction. Last November, however, the government issued the "Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order," under which 715 persons were arrested between December 15, 1977, and July 9, 1978. Of this number, 590 were freed (most of them after being beaten), 21 disappeared, two were assassinated and the rest remain in prison.

A report issued on September 19 by the International Commission of Jurists, following a study by Donald T. Fox, a New York attorney, concluded that the "effects of the new law seem to be clearly contrary to the stated intention to assure individual rights and public order and general welfare." The law, it added, "has become the focus of opposition by a wide spectrum of opposition groups," and "the procedure established under the law invites an abuse of power on the part of the security forces, evidence of torture and physical mistreatment is widespread, and there seems to be a concerted effort to conceal this fact."

To complicate matters, El Salvador remains technically in a state of war with neighboring Honduras, another military dictatorship, following their unresolved 1969 conflict. In fact, Central American republics are barely on speaking terms with each other. Costa Rica and Nicaragua are at odds over the support

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allegedly given Nicaraguan guerrillas from Costa Rican territory. Guatemala and Panama resumed diplomatic relations only late in August. One of the results of this state of affairs is the virtual collapse of the Central American Common Market, once hailed as a major regional economic achievement. Internal upheavals combine with regional antagonisms to undermine all efforts at rationalizing economic development in this impoverished area.

Guatemala ranks next after El Salvador in the Central American violence cycle. There a new president, army general Romeo Lucas Garcia, took office last July following a fraudulent election, and has produced no solutions to the country's underlying awesome social problems.

In Guatemala, too, the battle is over land ownership, pitting the landowner-military establishment against Indian peasants. Last May, for example, the army massacred at least 43 peasants—some sources say 114 were killed—in the township of Panzos after an Indian uprising. As in El Salvador, the battle lines are drawn between the government forces supported by right-wing vigilante units ("Eye for an Eye" and "White Hand" are the principal rightist terror groups) and extreme leftist guerrillas operating in the cities and the countryside. The most important leftist movement is the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), which has contacts with El Salvador's People's Revolutionary Army.

The intensity of the leftist guerrilla operations is less than during the open rebellion of the late 1960s, but there are signs that it is growing again although the EGP hasn't yet openly challenged the new Lucas regime. One of the ironies of the Guatemalan situation is that the country's economy is statistically sound—it has $800 million in foreign currency reserves—while the distribution of wealth remains abominable. The social and political conflict is aggravated by the wresting away of land from the Indians by rich landowners. The Indians, of course, support the EGP revolutionaries. Tension is felt in Guatemala City where, as in San Salvador, there are armies of private bodyguards to protect the rich from assassination and kidnappings.

And Guatemala, too, has an international problem: it claims the British colony next door, the territory of Belize (also known as British Honduras). Mexico also has a claim on Belize, but Guatemalan regimes have been using this issue to rally the country behind them.

Honduras, another study in Central American poverty, is likewise rent by social and political conflicts. Since August it has been governed by General Policarpo Paz Garcia, who heads a three-man military junta. The junta seized power when it overthrew General Juan Alberto Melgar Castro, a military dictator who had been in office since *his* coup in 1975. President Melgar had been regarded as a relatively moderate autocrat; the impression is that the new junta is much more rightist in political persuasion.

Panama, which does not regard itself as part of Central America, but must be considered in the overall regional context, may be in for serious difficulties because of the September decision by General Omar Torrijos to give up his post as head of government. He has proposed the National Assembly elect Education Minister Aristides Royo as president of Panama while Torrijos retains the command of the National Guard. But power in Panama is vested in the National Guard, and Royo is unlikely to function in full independence.

Torrijos has exercised dictatorial power for 10 years while pushing social reforms. He chose to withdraw into the background following the settlement of the Panama Canal dispute with the United States and the ratification of the treaties earlier this year. He has promised a return to civilian government and has formed the new Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), but so long as the National Guard remains in his hands, Torrijos may well continue to be the *de facto* ruler.

As for Royo, 38 years old, his leftist tendencies may push him into conflict with the still-powerful Panamanian private economic sector. The Panamanian economy is already faltering and, at the other end of the spectrum, there is considerable political agitation at the universities. Thus Panama is one more point of instability in the region.

And, unexpectedly, Costa Rica is entering a period of difficulties. The new president, Rodrigo Carazo, appears to be determined to slow down the pace of social changes set by his predecessor, Daniel Oduber. The first crisis Carazo faced was a two-week strike by 16,000 social security employees, paralyzing all the hospitals in the country. The strike was settled peacefully, but Costa Ricans think that it was a forerunner of approaching labor and political problems. For one thing, the government is concerned by the growing strength of the Communist party in labor unions.

The new mood was reflected in a televised speech on July 27 by Interior and Public Security Minister Juan Echeverria, who noted that Costa Ricans were losing their respect for authority under the country's democratic institutions and, increasingly, taking matters into their own hands through strikes and demonstrations. "In Costa Rica," he added, "many have confused liberty with libertinism."

Central America, then, is in the throes of mounting tension and instability. Nicaragua is the dramatic example of it, but pressures are building everywhere. It would be useful for the US to pay serious attention to this phenomenon.

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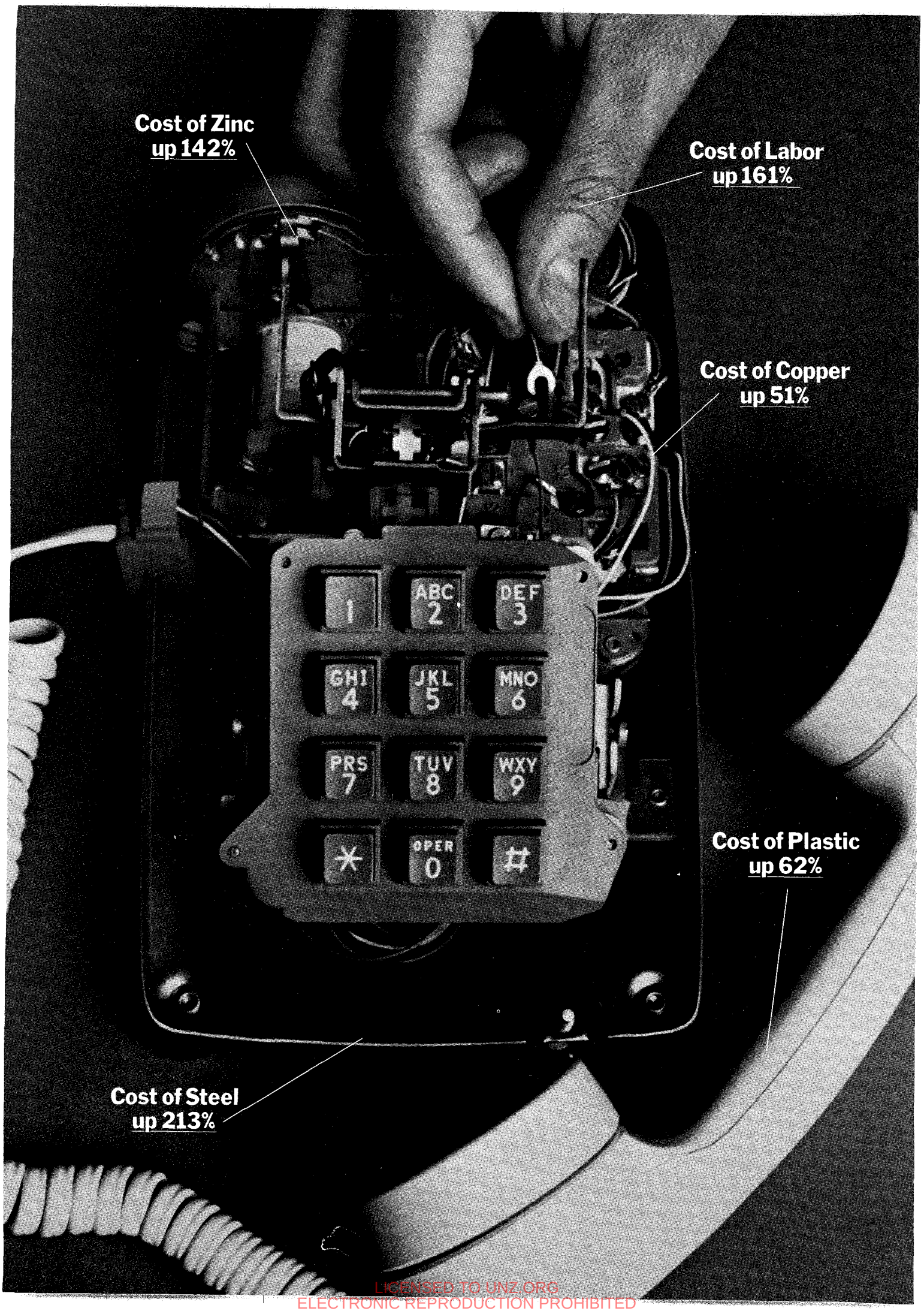

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Arts and Lives

Stanley Kauffmann on films

A Master, Working

Ingmar Bergman makes films in two different temporal forms: those in the usual single narrative, progressing through the present (*Smiles of a Summer Night, Winter Light*), and those in double narrative, progressing through present and past (*The Naked Night, Wild Strawberries*). The difference is not merely that the double films contain flashbacks. The past is not visited just for information: it's treated as being present in the present, and the present is seen as a means of redeeming or fulfilling the past. In both temporal forms Bergman is never far from the ideas of fate that haunted Strindberg and, even more, Ibsen; but the double film manifests the pressure of fate more vividly than the single one. It's as if Bergman, a veteran of the theater, were using the film medium to show two time planes in ways that the theater now rarely uses. The Greeks displayed their gods pronouncing human destinies that the drama then worked out. But since the Renaissance, fate in drama has generally been seen as it concluded, with only enough of the past *told* to us to explain the iron grip. In Bergman's hands, the film once again makes the origins of fate visible. This is hardly to say that Bergman is better than Ibsen; but it's not too fanciful to think that if Ibsen were alive today, he might sometimes want to use the medium of film to make visible his grim juxtapositions of beginnings and ends.

Bergman's new film *Autumn Sonata* (New World) is in this double form. The title virtually predicts it: because the structure of a sonata is statement, development, and recapitulation—the fulfilling of thematic destinies. And this new film, like all good works, lives through its form. *Autumn Sonata* is easily Bergman's best picture since *The Passion of Anna* (1970) and will rank, I think, among his lasting works. It has some resemblance to an earlier film, *Through a Glass Darkly*, in which there is a father of middle years who is an artist, a novelist, whose relation with his daughter is the pivot of the action, an action that moves through the daughter's mental illness to an apprehension of God. *Autumn Sonata* has a sixtyish mother who is an artist, a concert pianist, and the pivotal relation is with her elder daughter. Here it is a younger daughter who has a brain affliction, but the encounter between mother and elder daughter brings the latter into closer apprehension of God, closeness to her own dead child, reconciliations with life.

The scene is Norway, but the dialogue is in Swedish. The elder daughter, Liv Ullmann, is married to a country clergyman considerably older than herself, Halva Björk. She has written two books; she busies herself with parish duties. With them lives her sister, Lena Nyman, who is cruelly stricken in speech and movement by some sort of spastic disorder. The husband adores his wife—they've been married eight years—and she values his love more than she returns it. Both are tender to the ill sister. Ullmann has not seen her celebrated mother for seven years. Accidentally she learns that the mother's long-beloved male companion has died, and she writes to her mother to come and visit them. The mother, Ingrid Bergman, arrives for a lengthy stay; she leaves the next day. The present time of the story is about 24 hours, but the present is only the focus where the long perspectives of the past come to a point.

The basic movement of the picture is foreordained. We infer at the start that, because mother and daughter have not seen each other for so long, there must be buried troubles between them. We infer that the warm embraces when the mother arrives, genuine though they are, cannot be the whole story, or else there would be no film. We know there will be revelations, and we know that Ingmar Bergman (I'll have to use both names to avoid confusion with Ingrid) would not be dealing in mechanical twists and surprises, so we have some general sense of how things are going to go. Strife is going to be uncovered. But one measure of the film's quality is that, though there is scarcely an emotional convolution that a mature viewer couldn't predict—I don't mean factual details—the picture grips relentlessly.

Ullmann, when a child, loved and worshipped and needed her mother. The mother loved her but feared her demands, left home often because of her career, then, when she was home, imposed attentions and guidance, almost rigorously. The little girl and her father shared loneliness when the mother was away, and one absence of the mother was for eight months with a lover. We don't learn what happened to the father, now presumably dead, but the child grew up reclusive, resentful, vulnerable. At 18 she found a lover and became pregnant, had an abortion at her mother's insistence, and at last drifted into this marriage. Most of these past events are *shown* (and mostly without sound)—so seamlessly presented that the term "flashback" is an indignity. Ingmar Bergman is treating the past and the present as inseparable.

In a scene between the clergyman and the mother, he tells her gently that Ullmann actually loved him for a time when she was pregnant and after. Their

Films Worth Seeing

The Buddy Holly Story. Biography of the composer-singer. Somewhat like latter-day Harold Lloyd despite rock music and sad ending. Enjoyable.

Girlfriends. Claudia Weill's small-scale, large-hearted, truth-searching story of a young New York woman. Makes *An Unmarried Woman* look like the plastic it always was.

Heaven Can Wait. Warren Beatty remakes *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, aided by Buck Henry and Elaine May. The 1941 supernatural comedy-romance comes through fairly snugly.

Women. The script of this Hungarian film unravels toward the end, but its story of two wives is beautifully done.

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boy drowned just before he reached four. Since then Ullmann has been different: devoted, occupied, slightly suspicious of her husband's attentions, feeling very keenly that her dead boy is close to her but feeling little else—except that her mother is somehow radically responsible. (And she also reminds the mother of a poignant incident which, in her view, makes the mother responsible for the worsening of the sick daughter's illness.)

Nothing here is, in any important sense, surprising. The daughter unburdens; the mother defends, justifies, *maintains* the self that she has reached after all these years. The film moves in ways that we have expected. Every moment, every single moment, is true and forceful, sometimes it's harrowing, but the effect of confirmation, rather than extension, is what finally keeps *Autumn Sonata* below the topmost level of Ingmar Bergman's work—the level of *Persona* and *The Passion of Anna*.

Most of this double drama takes place in the middle of the one night that the mother spends in the house. She awakes from a bad dream, and that dream itself has schematic relevance. Ullmann has told her mother that she sometimes feels her little boy near her, touching her hand. Later the mother is sleeping, the clock ticking loudly (the ticking of clocks is an Ingmar Bergman motif), and we see a woman's hand reach in and touch the mother's hand and face. She wakes, screams, turns on the light: no one there. (The ticking cuts off.) She goes downstairs, and Ullmann, awakened by the scream, joins her. So the dream that reflects the dream of the young bereft mother starts the scene between the older mother and her daughter.

That long scene, its double motion uninterrupted except for a few moments with the sick sister upstairs, is the core of the film and is in itself a classic in the Bergman canon. Also, as part of its very truth, it's a virtuoso scene for two actresses. Its climax is a terrible speech in which Ullmann demands of her mother whether she has made up for her own inner failures by making sure that the daughter has failures as well. ("Is the daughter's misfortune the mother's triumph?") But the mother is not shamed, only shaken, by the hate revealed *under the love*, a hate she must have suspected and to which she has her reply. (It's essential to note that the mother, too, has her own private spectrum of disappointments but that we last see her in a railway compartment with her agent, encircled by her career and by cozy regret for the life, passing by the train, in which she cannot share.)

Ingmar Bergman understands that, in our world, the arena for deepest experience is relationship by blood or marriage, not epic adventure. The struggles between those who live in the same house, or remember the same house, those are the agonies of our time that clarify or cloud our ideas of reality, of God. To call *Autumn Sonata* a domestic drama, you would have to call Strindberg's *The Father* a story of marital difficulties. Admittedly, Bergman's greatest work, *Persona*, the best tragedy I know of since the best O'Neill, is not concerned with family, but in most of his films, nakedness comes from abrasion between people who live or have lived together. In *Autumn Sonata* an ancient and frightening antagonism-love, between mother and daughter—more austere, I feel, than that between father and son—is the axe that splits open human beings to reveal chambers of desolation and ego-armory. The fact that the mother is an artist doesn't make the story exceptional: it only heightens matters that are relatively common and are not usually so perceptible.

It might be charged against Ingmar Bergman that this script has blatant touches. Hardly has the mother walked in the front door before she starts to reminisce about the death of her lover. The sister has been reduced by illness to infantilism, so that there will be a neo-infant near this faulty mother. Near the end the sick woman wriggles out of her bed and along the upstairs floor, whimpering for mama while her mother downstairs is talking about her own needs. After the mother leaves, Ullmann, thinking about suicide and her dead son, walks the next day in a cemetery. These and some other matters would be risky in lesser hands.

Ingmar Bergman directs Liv Ullmann and Ingrid Bergman in "Autumn Sonata"

But these hands are greater. And in his hands those matters recede as the film moves out of veristic realism into poetic realism and, before very long, almost into symbolism—an abstraction that looks like daily life but is really crystallizing it.

The director supports this daring in his script by the way he directs it: so magnificently, so integrally, that it's hard to think of script and direction separately. I have two picky reservations. At the start the clergyman addresses the camera, a fracture of the film's containment that serves no purpose I can see; and there is a pan shot of the mother's car approaching the house that ends with a close-up of flowers in the foreground—sentimental and out of style. Otherwise, the sheer making of the picture is so wonderful that there is a voluptuous pleasure simply in watching it. (I've seen it twice and will surely see it again.) I don't merely mean Sven Nykvist's perfect photography, I mean Bergman's employment of Nykvist and the actors.

A few examples. Doorways: the first shot is a long one through a doorway, and it's echoed throughout—so we get a sense of observing privacy, then approaching it. Letters: the film opens and closes with a letter of Ullmann's to her mother—communication between two separated people. Rich composition, held for its richness: the three heads—mother, Ullmann, sick daughter—when the mother goes in to visit the invalid.

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The *use* of music. (Remember Ullmann listening to Bach in *Persona*.) After dinner Ullmann plays a short Chopin prelude while the camera holds on her mother's face. Then her mother explains what's wrong with the interpretation and plays the prelude herself while the camera holds on Ullmann's bespectacled face next to her on the piano bench. The two musical interpretations and the two held shots on the listeners' faces are the marking-out of sides in a contest.

And, most beautiful, the scene near the end of the long night where the camera holds on the mother's face, close to us, as Ullmann, just behind her, facing her and us, moves to one side of her to speak, then back to the other. First, it's theatrical dynamics, which Bergman is never reluctant to use—moving his people *within* the frame for attack or recoil. Second, it's cinematically brilliant: the difference in depth, with the mother's face close, tells us in itself that the daughter is not reaching the mother. What's true of that scene is true throughout. I can't think of any film that better lights up the themes of its script through the way that it's composed.

And I must praise the actors though they are all beyond praise. Ullmann (to put it concisely) does what Ingmar Bergman asks of her, what he must have been planning to ask her while he was writing the script. At home again, literally and figuratively, Ullmann shows what she hasn't always shown abroad: she is an endearing presence and an overwhelming emotional actress. Lena Nyman, ungloriously remembered as the busty heroine of *I Am Curious: Yellow*, is so powerful as the sick woman that she hurts us. Björk, the clergyman, is a model of simplicity. Two Bergman stalwarts, Gunnar Björnstrand and Erland Josephson, have minor, mute parts. The astonishment is Ingrid Bergman's performance. We've all adored her for decades, but not many of us have thought her a superb actress. This is her first film with Ingmar Bergman and, I think, her first film in Swedish since she left home in the late 1930s. The director has released strengths and nuances in her that she may not have known she had, and he counted, I feel sure, on the confidence she regained by working in the first language that was engraved on her brain. (She has a few lines in English. You don't have to know Swedish to hear the change in subtlety of inflection.) She is exalted in the hands of a master. So is the whole film. So, differently and gratefully, are we.

James Lardner on television

The New Season: I

I dreamt the other night that I was watching a TV panel show called "The Love Experts," starring that same versatile cast of celebrities who have toiled so long and so valiantly on "To Tell the Truth," "What's My Line," "The Gong Show" and "The Hollywood Squares." They need no introduction. They know who they are.

An attractive young woman named Lynn was describing her love problem. "My husband is always in the mood," she lamented. "If I'm dressing, trying to get ready for work, he's undressing me. He has no outside interests."

"Do you have babies?" asked love expert Joanne Worley. Lynn shook her head. "Well, why don't you have one," said Worley. "Then he'll stop. Seriously, I think it's marvelous that a guy feels that way about you. I think you should thank God for small favors."

"Just relax and enjoy it," concurred love expert Jo Ann Pflug.

"In ten years you'll look back and say, hey, I had a pretty good thing going there," agreed love expert David Letterman.

Case closed. By unanimous decision, the love experts had ruled that Lynn should stop whining and be properly grateful for a husband who undresses her when she is trying to leave for work, and who has no outside interests.

Another contestant was a clean-scrubbed young midwesterner named Paul. "I'm 21 years old and I like dating liberated women," said Paul. "The problem is I don't believe in premarital sex."

"Now I'm not making fun of you," said love expert and veteran host Bill Cullen, "but you're 21 years old and *you're still a virgin*? By golly, I was too, but not by choice." At this, the studio audience and the love experts themselves exploded with laughter. "Well, why is that a problem?" asked Cullen.

Unruffled, Paul explained that he was having trouble locating women who would respect his views on the matter. In particular, the liberated women he liked to date were giving him the brush-off as soon as he had explained his position. Incidentally, Paul added, and somewhat incongruously, he was not ready for a "long term commitment." (Meaning, I assume, to a woman rather than an institution.)

"I applaud you for standing up for your own beliefs, I really do," said love expert Pflug. Here the audience gave Paul the obligatory ovation.

"Our panel is unanimous, and I must say I agree with them," declared Cullen. "It's refreshing. It's truthful. It's honest." Again the love experts had concluded that the contestant had nothing to complain about, and Paul was sent on his way.

I was sorry to see Paul leave. I had been hoping for a fuller explanation of that finely tuned morality of his that bars premarital sex but somehow poses no obstacle to his making a syndicated nationwide fool of himself on "The Love Experts."

Yes, "The Love Experts" is real. It is, at any rate, on the air—at 11:30 every weeknight in my town; check local listings for your town. How much of those kinky confessions we should believe is, of course, another matter. Since the "winner" of each round of "The Love Experts" is the contestant whose case is voted "the most interesting and unique love problem of the day," honesty may not be entirely the best policy.

But strictly on the level or otherwise, "The Love Experts" is inviting us to gawk at people whose lovemaking ideas, practices or circumstances are somehow out of kilter. (It goes without saying that these bizarre tales reflect no inner anguish on the part of the tellers. Inner anguish has a way of not being very funny.)

And the carnival sideshow brand of comedy practiced on "The Love Experts" is lamentably similar to that which characterizes several of the sitcoms the networks have dished up for the 1978-79 season.

On "Grandpa Goes to Washington," with Jack Albertson as a crusty, curmudgeonly variation on S. I. Hayakawa, comic relief is provided by the senator/hero's middle-aged son and

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daughter-in-law, one of the most unpleasant married couples ever to appear on stage or screen. The daughter-in-law delights in serving her family exotic fruits—figs, kiwis, rutabagas and mangoes. (Someone must have thought these names were intrinsically hilarious.) Her husband and children delight in exuding their disgust for these items and for the woman who has put them on the table.

To be truly comic, human folly has to be depicted with precision and compassion. The son and daughter-in-law on "GGTW" are ugly, but not funny. They hate each other. The scriptwriters give every indication of hating them both.

"You will have noticed the disposition of common sense, under pressure of some pertinacious piece of lightheadedness, to grow impatient and angry," wrote George Meredith in his *Essay on Comedy*. "That is a sign of the absence, or at least of the dormancy, of the comic idea. For folly is the natural prey of the Comic, known to it in all her transformations, in every disguise; and it is with the springing delight of hawk over heron, hound after fox, that it gives her chase, never fretting, never tiring, sure of having her, allowing her no rest . . . Contempt is a sentiment that cannot be entertained by comic intelligence. . . ."

The makers of "GGTW" obviously meant to mold a new manner of TV hero—a noble sexagenarian doing battle with the grasping "me" generation. Hence the villains and foils of the piece—Albertson's son and daughter-in-law, the sleazy college dean who mandatorily retires him, the crooked governor he beats at the polls—are ambitious, immoral and middle-aged.

But as a paean to senior citizenhood, "GGTW" hits altogether too many sour notes. A group of elderly women at a nursing home (where Albertson goes vote-hunting) behaves like a bunch of sitcomnincompoops. In another disconcerting scene, Albertson, the candidate of integrity, blithely blackmails his opponent into withdrawing from the race.

It takes many years and much good fortune to be handed the kind of creative elbow room Norman Lear now possesses, after "All in the Family," "Maude," "One Day at a Time" and "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman." So what has he done with his hard-earned autonomy? He has created the tired, formulaic "In the Beginning," a string of insult jokes pitting a with-it nun against an out-of-it priest. (Appropriately, "In the Beginning" follows smack on the heels of "The Jeffersons," another Lear series in which the bulk of the jokes involve a weak hero of surpassing stupidity and narrow-mindedness hurling invective at a somewhat liberated heroine.)

Lear's other new offering this fall is "Apple Pie," a case of zaniness for zaniness's sake. The premise of a woman recruiting a makeshift family through the classified ads is undeniably offbeat—but what else is it? And what does it have to do with the Depression setting or FDR's first inaugural address?

Many of the most talented people in TV are working in the field of comedy. Many of the most talented people in the field of comedy are working in TV. The medium that has given us "The Burns and Allen Show," "The Phil Silvers Show," "Our Miss Brooks," "Maverick," and "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" (plus its spinoffs) owes no one any apologies. But there is a growing senselessness in TV comedy—an anti-comic absence of purpose and human feeling—that bears watching, and is the reason why some of the new fall series don't.

But the news is not all so bleak. "Mork and Mindy" and "The Waverly Wonders" are at least friendly and unpretentious shows aimed at winning youngsters' hearts and doing them no lasting injury. As portrayed by Joe Namath, high school basketball coach (and part-time history teacher), Joe Casey displays far more honest warmth and sensitivity than the teacher/hero of "Welcome Back, Kotter," the show from which "The Waverly Wonders" has borrowed most liberally and conspicuously.

If you have ever been inside a New York City taxicab, you may have trouble believing that a fleet of them could be piloted by the crew of softies who constitute the regular cast of characters on "Taxi." If anything, this show is too quick to unearth the anguish that sometimes lurks beneath eccentric behavior. But "Taxi" has spirited writing and acting, and—wonder of wonders—a theme. It is about the nursing of unrealized aspirations. Every driver but one (the least interesting one) has another calling in life that has never had the decency to call.

When Andy Travis reports for work as the new program director of the hopelessly mismanaged "WKRP in Cin-

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cinnati," his new boss seems to have only a dim memory of hiring him. "I quit my job in Santa Fe and rented an apartment here in Cincinnati," says Travis, to underscore the certainty of the thing. "Do you think that's wise?" asks his boss. This is comedy that is recognizable and on-target. How many of us have ever reported for work to superiors who seemed not to have expected us?

To feel the presence of the Comic Spirit "is your assurance that many sane and solid minds are with you in what you are experiencing," wrote George Meredith: "and this of itself spares you the pain of satirical heat, and the bitter craving to strike heavy blows. . . ."

Like a dinghy launched among ocean liners, the premiere of "WKRP in Cincinnati" was bumped back half an hour by the Jimmy Carter, Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin Show, and very nearly sent on a collision course with Monday Night Football. The president had originally planned to address Congress—and the nation—at 9 pm, but Tip O'Neill reportedly persuaded him to switch to 8 pm, so as not to interfere with the game between O'Neill's beloved New England Patriots and the Baltimore Colts. Thus the Majority Leader nearly scuttled the most graceful and likable new comedy series of the season. But O'Neill was punished for his impudence. Defying all odds, the Patriots lost. Somewhere, the Comic Spirit is obviously alive and well.

Ignazio Silone

A Word of Farewell

In a sketch called "Visit to a Prisoner" Ignazio Silone recalls a childhood moment when he saw a "small, barefoot, ragged little man" being dragged through the streets of his village in the Abruzzi. "Look how funny he is," the boy said to his father.

My father looked severely at me, dragged me to my feet by the ear and led me to his room. I had never seen him so angry at me.

'What have I done wrong?' I asked him, rubbing my injured ear.

'Never make fun of a man who's been arrested! Never!'

'Why not?'

'Because he can't defend himself. And because he may be innocent. In any case, because he's unhappy.'

Thinking about this anecdote, I remembered a remark made by the Yiddish poet H. Leivick when he was accused of turning toward a Christian celebration of suffering. Leivick said, "I saw in Jesus simply the prisoner." It is a sentence Silone could have spoken.

In another sketch the young Silone meets Don Orione, a priest who calmly puts up with the boy's impertinence and even carries his bags during a journey. When the boy finally apologizes, the priest smiles and says it does not matter: "My real vocation, a secret which I want to tell you, would be to live like a real donkey of God, a real donkey of Divine Providence."

In these anecdotes—one about the origins of his public role as socialist, the other about his fascination with primitive Christianity—Silone brought together his deepest feelings about the life of our time. The anecdote is for him the core of narrative, the crux of thought. The anecdote is what remains, undefiled, at a moment when all words must be suspect. For the spiritual condition to which his novels keep returning, as Silone says, "resembles a camp of refugees in some no man's land, out in the open, existing by chance. What do you expect refugees to do from morning to night? They spend the best

Books by Ignazio Silone

Mr. Aristotle (short stories)
And He Hid Himself (play)
A Handful of Blackberries
The Secret of Luca
Fontamara
The Fox and the Camellias
Bread and Wine
The School for Dictators
The Seed Beneath the Snow
Story of a Humble Christian

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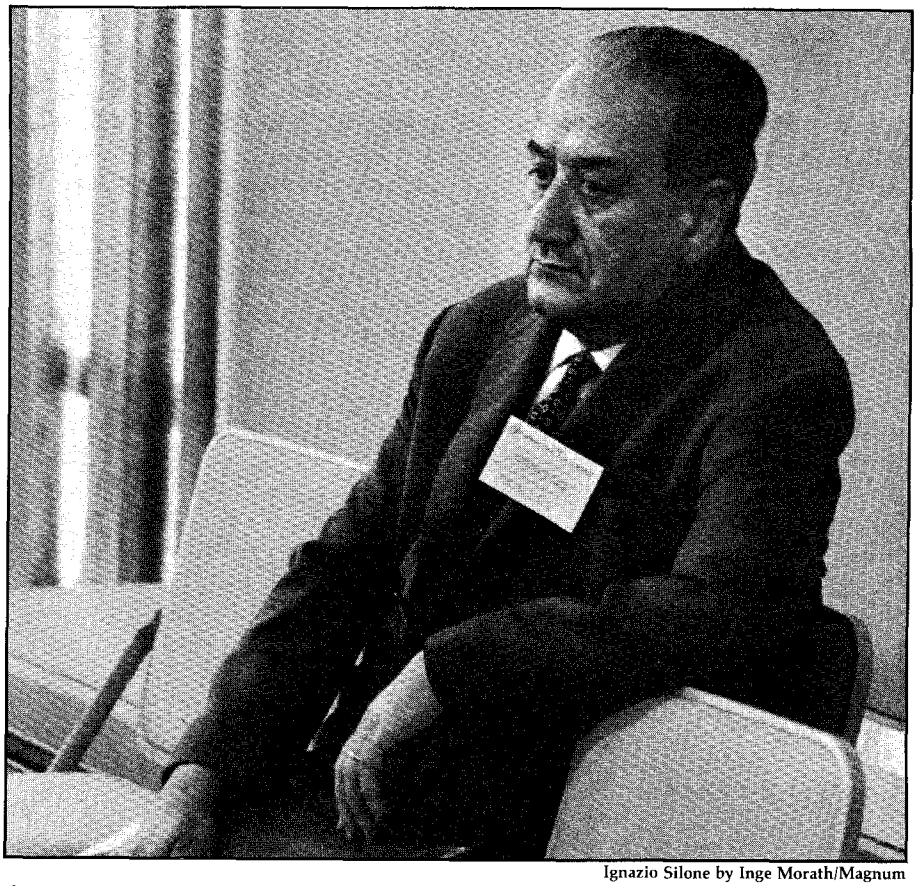
part of their time telling each other their stories. The stories are not very entertaining, to be sure, but they tell them anyhow—mainly, to understand what has happened."

Since he first published *Fontamara*, that stirring fable of peasant revolt in Mussolini's Italy, Silone has served—if I may twist his own words—as a "real donkey of man," patiently looking for paths out of the darkness of this century. In everything he wrote there is the same rebellion against injustice, the same tone of fraternal but undeluded humaneness, the same voice of irritable friendliness. Whatever was best in the socialist tradition, surviving dogma and certainty, found a home in his books. When Silone died a few weeks ago, at the age of 78, there were surely in every city of the world a few people, scarred by history but still intent upon hope, who felt they had lost a friend.

At the age of 15 Silone joined the Socialist Youth League of Italy, impelled by outrage over the wretchedness of the peasants. For some 15 years politics was his life blood. When the Italian Communist Party was formed in 1921 by Gramsci, Bordiga, and Togliatti, the young Silone, representing the Socialist youth, joined with them. Later he served as a leader of the anti-fascist underground. In 1927 he journeyed with Togliatti to Moscow where both rebelled, a little, against a Comintern proposal to sign a denunciation of Trotsky without even having read the document they were to declare heretical. Some dark years of ill health and exile followed, with inner moral and intellectual confusion, and finally a break from the party. The rest of his life Silone devoted to writing, though after the liberation of Italy he participated for a while in the revived Socialist movement.

He was a transforming presence: the least bitter of anti-Communists, the most reflective of radical democrats. He clung to hope because he believed nihilism to be the worst of diseases, yet he was himself subject to periods of depression and in the postwar years had a reputation of being inaccessible and morose. The few times I met him, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I found him wonderfully amusing and friendly as he talked at night in the Piazza Navona.

Silone's novels are wry, sardonic, weary, tinged with disillusion, yet no writer of our time so persistently, even nobly, devotes himself to the theme of human renewal. Brought up in the Abruzzi, he knew and loved the Italian peasants, but knew and loved too well



Ignazio Silone by Inge Morath/Magnum

for even a faint alloy of sentimentalism. Educated in Italy, a nation sagging under the culture of rhetoric, he seemed immune to all the enticements of verbal display. He could make a small thing—a casual gesture by one of his characters, a sly phrase of his own—seem a token of redemptive possibilities.

To read his three major books, *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *School for Dictators*, is to encounter the oldness of things in Europe: all those clever, tormented priests, all those hunted, doubting revolutionists linked by a parallel distance from power. *Fontamara*, yoking intellectual sophistication with peasant humor, is one of the few important fictions of our time to have absorbed the Marxist outlook at the level of myth. *The School for Dictators* is a brilliantly clever dialogue about the nature of fascism, the sickness of authoritarianism. *Bread and Wine* is darkened with the experience of defeat: no other work of fiction in our century so poignantly, yet without a fleck of self-pity, conveys the experience of European socialism as it crumbles under fascist attack. A broken revolutionist puts on the frock of a priest for disguise and then more than disguise, yet takes it off as soon as there is a possibility of action. Moving toward a version of Christian socialism or socialist Christianity, Silone accepts as inherent in our condition the duality between the need for action and the hunger for contemplation, between the struggle for power and the urge to purity. This duality becomes the substance of tragedy yet also a spur to choice and freedom.

The novels that follow—*The Seed Beneath the Snow*, *A Handful of Blackberries*, *The Secret of Luca*, *The Fox and the Camellias*—are more problematic, sometimes a little sluggish in their moral anxiety and seldom as rich as the earlier work in Silone's humor. But there is some. In *The Secret of Luca* an old Italian peasant thinks back to a moment of childhood:

> *I remember Don Serafino asking me at the catechism examination to explain the sign of the cross. 'It reminds us of the Passion of our Lord,' I told him, 'and it's also the way unfortunates sign their names.' The parish priest remarked that my answer wasn't wrong, but that I was hardly in a position to revise the answers in the catechism.*

Brief, spare, mere bones of narrative, these last fictions search in ordinary experience for a point of transcendence, the possibility of goodness almost without reason, flauntingly, gratuitous, as a necessity of our nature.

Silone remained a socialist of a kind, but shed the Marxist system, smiling at its claims to "science" and "inevitability." He came to love the stories of Jesus and Jesus's obscure followers, the humble souls who took him at his word. If Silone

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was a Christian, it was without church or theology, probably without belief, just out of a feeling for the agony of the crucified. His socialism consisted, as he said, in "an affirmation of the priority of the human person above all the economic and social mechanisms which oppress him."

In his essay "The Choice of Comrades" Silone writes: "One fine Sunday some of us stopped going to mass, not because Catholic dogma seemed to us, all of a sudden, false, but because the people who went began to bore us and we were drawn to the company of those who stayed away. . . . What characterized our revolt was the choice of comrades."

That choice, the first great turning of his life, made him a socialist. The moral aspirations behind that choice then led him to a second turning, always the more difficult one in a man's life. But after this second turning, he still insisted upon remaining in the company of those who refuse to yield to the given, who cling to an image of the possible. There were friends of his, most not known to him personally, who felt that he spoke for them so honestly and with such good faith, that their lives seemed a little less lonely.

He became the comrade of our choice.

Irving Howe

Irving Howe is most recently the author of *Leon Trotsky* (Viking).

Books Considered

The Ozone War
by Harold Schiff and Lydia Dotto

(Doubleday; $10.00)

Philosophers have long debated man's purpose and destiny on earth but none has ever suggested so bathetic an end as that the species would perish because of its addiction to underarm deodorant sprays.

This axillary eschatology was first proposed in 1973 by two scientists at the University of California, Irvine, Sherry Rowland and Mario Molina. Their thesis was that fluorocarbons, the long-lived chemicals used as propellants in many aerosol sprays, were slowly drifting up into the stratosphere where they would catalyze the destruction of the ozone layer. A tenuous blanket of molecules six miles thick, the ozone layer absorbs the part of the sun's ultraviolet rays which is most damaging to living things. With the blanket destroyed, or even appreciably diminished, life on earth might in time become impossible for any organism incapable of carrying a parasol or wearing sun-goggles.

The Rowland-Molina thesis touched off an acrid debate, which took place in two distinct but interacting arenas. One discussion was among scientists, who were trying, under rather greater pressure than attends most scientific problems, to decide if the figures and assumptions of the thesis had merit. The other, in the political arena, was dominated by the protests of the aerosol spray makers, such as Nixon crony Robert Abplanalp, and of DuPont, the largest manufacturer of fluorocarbons.

The Ozone War is a lively, if sometimes overdetailed, account of this debate. Focused on the process of the debate rather than its substance, it constitutes a pertinent political primer for those interested in knowing what to believe when groups of equally qualified experts issue flatly contradictory statements.

The authors of *The Ozone War*, both participants in the war they describe, are an unusual journalist-scientist team. Lydia Dotto, now a freelancer, covered the story for the Toronto *Globe and Mail*; Harold Schiff is a professor of chemistry at York University in Toronto and was a member of the National Academy of Sciences committee which served as supreme court on the issue.

Dotto and Schiff have an acute understanding of the scientific decision-making process. Eurekas may mark breakthroughs but the committee consensus is the hallmark of much normal science. It took three years for the National Academy of Sciences to set its imprimatur on the Rowland-Molina thesis, and even then with reservations. So full of caveats was the savants' verdict that it was interpreted in diametrically opposite ways. "Aerosol ban opposed by science unit," proclaimed *The Washington Post*'s headline. "Scientists Back New Aerosol Curbs to Protect Ozone in Atmosphere," averred *The New York Times*.

Part of the confusion was that the scientists, not trusting the regulators to understand the uncertainties in their calculations, took it upon themselves to recommend that regulation be postponed. But the regulators ignored the scientists' advice and proceeded as rapidly as possible to phase out the trivial uses of fluorocarbons, such as in aerosol sprays. It was enough that the scientists had agreed there was an effect—probably a 7.5 percent reduction in the ozone layer, with a range of uncertainty from two to 20 percent. What to do about it was a social decision that was not the scientists' to make. "It's a simple case of negligible benefit measured against possible catastrophic risk, both for individual citizens and for society," Food and Drug Administration commissioner Alexander Schmidt declared in announcing the phase-out.

The academy scientists confirmed predictions that destruction of the ozone layer could cause an increased incidence of skin cancer and profound climatic changes. Industry's role in the ozone war was confined to pursuit of its short-term interests. First its spokesmen ridiculed the Rowland-Molina thesis; then, when the thesis was corroborated, they argued that the predicted effects would be insignificant. They warned that a ban on fluorocarbons would cause massive unemployment and dislocation, yet adapted painlessly to the phase-out, for which they had secretly prepared well in advance. The day after the FDA timetable was announced, Robert Abplanalp launched a new spray system based on butane and water instead of fluorocarbons. The new system, he explained, "would have

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wiped out fluorocarbons anyway." DuPont was not mortally wounded. Fluorocarbons for aerosols constituted 0.5 percent of its sales for 1976. "Despite their complaints that regulation would destroy the industry—surely, by now, an almost Pavlovian response on the part of any industry facing new regulations—it would appear that the aerosol industry is coping nicely, if reluctantly, with the imminent disappearance of fluorocarbon propellants," Dotto and Schiff conclude.

The story of the ozone war is unlikely to find a place in histories of our epoch, yet it seems on present evidence to have been a close call. The ozone layer is perhaps the weakest known link in the earth's life support system. The fluorocarbons drifting up through the atmosphere take many years to reach the stratosphere and start breaking down the ozone. Had use of fluorocarbons continued unabated, the point might have been reached where nothing could have been done. Ozone is made naturally by the action of the sun's rays on oxygen, on a scale of magnitude that could not be duplicated. DuPont had studied the ecological effects of fluorocarbons, only to conclude the chemically inert substances had no adverse effects because they "were not decomposed by the usual chemical reactions near the earth." It occurred neither to DuPont, nor to the community of atmospheric scientists, to ask what happened when fluorocarbons reached the stratosphere. Both Rowland and Molina were chemists who knew nothing about atmospheric science in 1973, when they decided to follow the fate of fluorocarbons as a pure research project. It took them less than three months to work out that the chemicals were destroyed only in the stratosphere, where their breakdown product catalyzed the degradation of ozone.

The fluorocarbon threat has not yet been fully dealt with, since the chemicals are still used extensively, though not in such immediately releasable form, for refrigeration and various industrial applications. The fluorocarbons already in the atmosphere will exert their maximum effect in about 10 years' time. The effect may be insignificant in comparison with the natural fluctuations in the quantity of ozone, or it may not—the acceptable degree of reduction has not been defined. According to academy scientists' predictions, the ozone shield will then begin gradually to recover, taking a century to regain its 1978 level. The spray cans used during the 1960s and 1970s will thus cause a legacy of ozone depletion lasting only four generations. If other countries follow the American lead in regulating fluorocarbons—so far only Canada and Sweden appear to have done so—mankind will, by a somewhat narrow margin, have saved itself from the poisonous fruits of its own folly.

Nicholas Wade

Nicholas Wade is a reporter for *Science* magazine.

Germany 1866-1945
by Gordon A. Craig

(Oxford University Press; $19.95)

"Is it a mistake to begin with Bismarck?" asks Gordon Craig in the first sentence of this massive history of Germany. This represents less a question than a challenge. Beginning with Bismarck—Bismarck on the battlefield to boot—may not be a mistake, but it does signal a relentlessly traditional approach. As the rigidly observed dates in the title suggest, Craig conceives it to be his duty to set out the narrative of the German nation-state, the *Reich*, organized between 1866 and 1870, and destroyed in 1945 after experiments with empire, republic and totalitarianism and two attempts at international hegemony.

The notable Oxford History of Europe series in which this volume appears has allowed its distinguished authors wide latitude in approach. Craig's immediate predecessor, Theodore Zeldin, carried out his assignment on France as a challenging two-volume series of essays on the family, the professions, the political game, tastes, neuroses and cuisine. Zeldin's implicit objective seems to have been to serve as a Balzac of history. Craig, on the other hand, revives a Rankean concern with international rivalry and a Tacitus-like moral preoccupation with the corruptions of power.

There is justification for Craig's approach: the Reich was created and destroyed by war, and bitter political divisions at home reflected alternative foreign-policy options. Moreover, Craig has been able to draw upon a vast new monographic literature and a scholarly debate over German politics and expansionism that has been keenly focused and enriched during the last decade and a half. This has not been the result of the tiresome new biographies of Hitler with their insistence—who would deny it?—that individuals can shape history. The more challenging question is under what circumstances do individuals get this opportunity. In fact, the best German and English-speaking scholars have gone beyond this claim to explore the social and economic determinants of German politics; and Craig has clearly mastered their contributions. Most notably, Fritz Fischer's work forced historians and the *Spiegel*-reading public to come to terms with the ugly expansionism of imperial Germany. While William II was not Hitler, Ludendorff's

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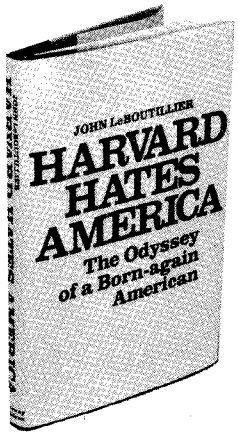

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aspirations, as Craig agrees, approached the *Mein Kampf* model, and German policy from 1938 to 1945 could not be treated as a total aberration as conservative historians had insisted.

Historical debate over military and diplomatic ambition likewise forced reconsideration of the political systems at home that encouraged brutal international behavior. Craig himself has presented to English-language readers the translated essays of one of the early historical critics of the Prussian-German ruling system, Eckart Kehr, who in the 1920s scathingly dissected the class basis of Wilhelmian institutions and foreign policy, but whose analysis had little influence at home until the 1960s. In effect German historiography has benefited from a "revisionist" challenge not dissimilar to the one mounted in recent American historical writing—but perhaps closer to historical mastery of the society's real legacy.

Craig's work has digested these controversies and initiates the reader who will follow his extensive notation to all of them. I find individual judgements sensible and sound: without being strident or anti-German as such, he is as critical in his views of the 19th-century governing system as even the most acerbic German historians of the Empire. Craig's Germany enforced conformity, suppressed socialist dissent, had an egregious record on women's rights even in an epoch where no society had a good one; it encouraged lick-spittle subordination to military display and bureaucratic authority. Craig emphasizes that Bismarck's legacy included not merely a united nation-state, but a cowed parliament and an almost *de facto* plebiscitarian authoritarianism. Like the "good Germans," Craig's sympathies are clearly with the democrats who tried to overcome their country's truculence, conformism and stratification.

Craig's unit on the First World War is a solid interweaving of military history with the institutional changes wrought in German life—more satisfying than the equivalent final chapter on the second war. But then Craig's forte is analysis of bureaucratic and military structures, and Hitler's regime and Hitler's war tended to dissolve all of these into flux, to subordinate them to arbitrary, increasingly erratic will. Craig's chapters on the Weimar Republic do not endorse recent left-wing regrets for a democracy that might have been built on worker's councils; but they clearly indict the Social Democrats for relying on the military and for failing to overcome a tired machine politics. Still, Craig places blame for the collapse of Weimar where it belongs: on the broadly based middle-class elements impatient with party and responsive to executive power, on the business and landed elites with their hatred for a system that allowed labor spokesmen into cabinets, and on the Left's disdain for the democratization that had been achieved. Finally, Craig does not spare the German resistance to Hitler: honoring its bravery, he is frank about its often romantic and conservative objectives. He also reminds us how little of it there was.

All the good causes, all the most recent scholarship. Still Craig's book and indictment are curiously old-fashioned, perhaps because even without the most recent wave of monographs liberal historians emerged with the same outline and conclusions a generation ago. Doubtless it is not fair to reproach the author for writing an old-fashioned political and military history.

But allowing Craig his choice one must still ask whether this history of German political and military institutions and international behavior—leavened, admittedly, by chapters on religion, learning and the arts—is really the most advantageous synthesis that might now be offered. To record a national experience is an enormous task and requires selectivity. But so many other thematic strands need to be included. There is, for example, no explanation of Germany's prodigious economic development; we learn that in 1914 Duke Albrecht of Württemberg commanded the Fourth Army (but then every prince got an army) but precious little about the steel and chemical industries that made the war effort possible. This is history without infrastructure, at best blood without iron.

Other questions demand treatment. Granted the conservatism of the professors, how did German (and Austrian) society produce such an efflorescence of science and social thought? How did Germans seek to control the massive urbanization of the later 19th century? How did they talk about citizenship in the Empire and the Republic, the Third Reich? How did they treat the poor or those who ran afoul of the law? Admittedly the Germans themselves have lagged in posing these questions, and those scholars both in Germany and in this country who have explored them have focused more attention on the years before 1848—

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perhaps because the earlier period has not been overburdened by the disastrous political legacy of the Third Reich.

Nonetheless, in the memoirs, novels, statistics, magazines the raw material for a broader if provisional history currently exists. Barrington Moore Jr.'s recent *Injustice*, for example, exploited available working-class autobiographies in a way that historians have not yet done.

This is not a plea to abandon the elite for the plebs. Men at the top in Germany made decisions that sacrificed immeasurable masses of Europeans: on the Marne, before Moscow, at Auschwitz. Their power to dispose of lives alone justifies careful consideration of their possibilities for action. But the historians of Germany must explore their milieu more broadly than hitherto. Certainly after Craig's synthesis it is time to move on. It is one thing to begin with Bismarck; another not to go beyond him.

Charles Maier

Charles Maier, the author of *Recasting Bourgeois Europe* (Princeton), is currently preparing a study of the United States and European institutional reconstruction after World War II.

Running Dog by Don DeLillo

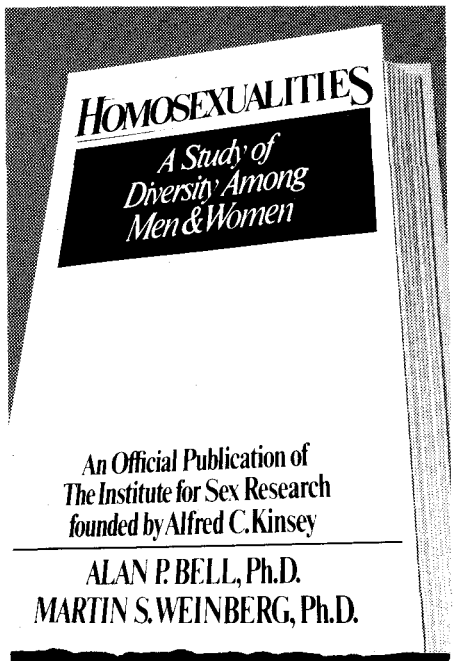
(Knopf; $8.95)

Plenitude and excess distinguish much of our best fiction: Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Coover's *The Public Burning*, Gaddis's *JR*, McElroy's *Lookout Cartridge*. Don DeLillo has their exhaustive impulse, but his six novels, singly and together, are a reversed cornucopia. They spiral from the overripe riches of America toward a difficult silence. More than any other novelist to emerge in this decade, Don DeLillo knows the spoiled goods of America and knows as well that a novel made in the USA may be implicated in the waste and noise of its place. His tactics have been attack and withdrawal.

DeLillo's first novel, about the television industry, was *Americana*, an apt title and paradigm for all his books. Its protagonist breaks away from a public life in entertainment to an embattled privacy. The main characters of *Great Jones Street* and *End Zone* travel off the map of amusement, separate themselves from the flash of rock and roll and the war games of football for a sacrificial silence. In *Ratner's Star* the excesses of scientific analysis end in speechlessness. And in *Players* the playing of consumer games and adventuring into forbidden sex and violence end only in futility.

"The beast is loose/Least is best" say the lyrics of Bucky Wunderlick in *Great Jones Street*. Minimalism has its great examplars in Beckett and Borges, but it also has its attendant difficulty: "The less there is," says a character in *Running Dog*, "the more you're tested to find the things that do exist." It is a test for reader and writer alike, one that DeLillo does not manage well in this new novel. Narrowed, flattened and polished, *Running Dog* reads too much like some compacted version of the literary waste—the intrigue—from which DeLillo has presumably meant to separate it with artful reduction. But because *Running Dog* features the contractive method that worked in the earlier books, especially *Players*, it remains an interesting novel, an experimental coda to a major writer's career.

As with most of DeLillo's fiction, the subject of *Running Dog* is entertainment: the characters want to possess what they believe is a pornographic film of Hitler and his inner circle made just before the fall of Berlin. An old porn merchant named Lightborne wants the film to verify his scholarly interest and his personal fascination with Hitler; United States Senator Percival would add it to his collection of erotica; upstart smut king Richie Armbrister fights with the Mafia for it. For Earl Mudger, a retired CIA operator, the film will be a valuable product; for the journalist Moll Robbins it's a story for her magazine. Caught among the deals and betrayals of these would-be buyers, sellers, and viewers is former CIA agent Frank Selvy, the only person not interested in the film and the familiar DeLillo hero who withdraws into what he calls "the



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machine of self" and travels to a desert solitude. When he is killed because of a mechanical failure, a mistake he makes while killing one of the two assassins who trail him, DeLillo undermines even this minimal survival strategy.

Pornography as our most important product: the obscening of America is a pointed and effective metaphor in the novel. Government, business, crime, and press collaborate; they are all running dogs in a capitalist Consumerland that increasingly exhausts what entertains it. Conditioned like Pavlov's dogs, suppliers and consumers salivate for some ultimate frisson—sex, death, and Reality in the filmed person of Hitler. Even Selvy, who wants out, is just another kind of running dog, driving straight toward what he knows as home, the paramilitary training base that conditioned him. That Hitler, in the film DeLillo "shows" us, is more human than DeLillo's Americans is his final ironic obscenity.

Running Dog is a world of behavior and use. People are points on a graph, points nearly obliterated by the plot lines that connect them. Violence and copulation are sudden, reactive, without what Selvy calls "moderating precepts." The dialogue is tough, short and brittle; the writing narrows to a succession of subjects, verbs, and objects, bodies in motion. I'd like to think DeLillo wanted the reduced manner of the novel—its emptiness and verbal impoverishment—to reflect the characters' reduced lives, the culture's reaching its most probable state; but instead he seems to be exploiting his material. Because they are figures from our public mythology, a flood of ready-made associations and connections fills the gaps created by DeLillo's subtraction. The novel's first line is "You won't find ordinary people here," but in fact its characters are as ordinary as dollar movies, prime-time television, and *People* magazine. The novel itself comes to be a stimulus-response machine, a transistorized pot-boiler.

Most of DeLillo's other novels could have been reduced to the outline that *Running Dog* is, but no matter how bleak the behavior in these books they have a gaiety of language, a cross-cutting of discourses. One understands why DeLillo has given up on people; but one hopes he hasn't given up on words, of which fictional people are made. As Selvy travels toward his death, he lists what he has left behind: "All that incoherence. Selection, election, option, alternative. All behind him now. Codes and formats. Courses of action. Values, bias, predilection." The "incoherence" of multiple voices, the "codes and formats" of language itself, the "values" tested by silence—these are precisely what DeLillo leaves out of *Running Dog*, the qualities that make his other fiction so vital *and* lucid. DeLillo is too good, too verbally sophisticated a writer to knock off Jerzy Kosinski novels, which *Running Dog* resembles in its worst moments. A character in *End Zone* speaks of trying "to create degrees of silence." That's DeLillo's gift, not zero degrees but degrees, fine gradients of something and nothing.

Thomas LeClair

Thomas LeClair teaches contemporary fiction in the Department of English, University of Cincinnati.

Arthur Rex
by Thomas Berger

(Delacorte; $10.95)

Thomas Berger might be called the Green Knight of American fiction: a mysterious, protean outsider whose pose of destructiveness masks a fierce reverence for form and meaning. His best-known novel, *Little Big Man*, is a compassionate parody of the Western genre and of the American West itself; *Sneaky People*, published in 1975, is a comic masterpiece about low intrigue in a small town. *Who is Teddy Villanova?*, his last novel, simultaneously demolishes the private-eye novels of the 1940s and the allusive academic fiction of today.

Arthur Rex, a massive retelling of the Camelot legend, may be Berger's most ambitious book, at least in size and literary scale. He has forged his version of the familiar story—noble Arthur, unfaithful Guinevere, tormented Launcelot, and the dozens of familiar knights and ladies surrounding them—by drawing, as far as I can tell, on all the literary sources—the enormous body of work, dating from sixth century to the present, of Nennius, Tennyson, T.H. White, and countless others. His chief source—to which he is often surprisingly faithful—is Sir Thomas Malory, author of the massive 15th-century chronicle, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. But despite this careful scholarship, despite a prose style which borders on genius, despite many funny moments and a few painfully sad ones, *Arthur Rex*, in the end, remains less than the sum of its parts.

It begins, as one might expect, in humor and parody. Merlin quotes Freud and conjures up a tin-can telephone; Sir Kay, the Round Table's waspish headwaiter, wins honor as the inventor of the steam trolley; Sir Gawaine stars in a wickedly sexy parody of his famed adventure with the Green Knight.

Arthur himself at first seems merely a good-humored dimwit. His first act on ascending the throne is a vain attempt to close the brothel-convents flourishing behind St. Paul's cathedral. For much of the story, he eludes the malice of his enemies with the razor-edge good luck that always saved sleepwalkers teetering on high girders in silent films. Berger's version of the King's "seduction" by his half-sister Margawse (the incestuous union that produces the villainous Mordred, and, thus, the entire tragedy of the Round Table) is as funny as anything I have ever read. The enchantress comes to Caerleon with the honest purpose of killing Arthur and making off with his treasure, but finds herself—by neither her own intent nor that of the hopelessly inexperienced Arthur—somehow dizzied, disrobed, impregnated, and dismissed without a penny. In this episode, Berger's wacky diction, a mad half-parody of Malory's prose style, is at its best:

> *. . . with her dexter hand [Margawse] followed the curve of the wall and felt with her dainty feet the stone treads, of which she used the broadest portion, at the maximum of their centrifugation, and the masons had laid them with such marvelous exactitude that each conformed to the rule of all, so that having found the pace, one could misstep only willfully, unless the constant revolution ever downwards agitated the humors causing vertigo. The which, in the case of this lady, came to happen. . . .*

This is not the only moment in the story at which I laughed out loud. But *Arthur Rex* is not a spoof. Much of its narrative—the adulterous love of

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Launcelot and Guinevere, the parallel tragedy of Tristram, Isold, and Mark, Sir Gawaine's rise from lechery and fall into vengeance—is seriously intended and often quite moving. The central tragedy in the book is that of Arthur, who attempts to found his table on pure virtue. The book's subtitle is "A Legendary Novel"; taking this term in its oldest meaning, we might consider it as the life story not primarily of a King, but of a saint. For all Arthur's goofiness, his ability to take a pratfall when the author requires it, I think Berger may intend to show Arthur as exactly that: a man who aspires to Godliness with his whole being, a seeker of selflessness who suffers the defeat of those who try for perfection.

Berger ascribes a larger role in the story to God than did the reverent but skeptical Malory. The author of *Arthur Rex* takes a dark, deeply Protestant view of life: God gives to each of us a nature, with strengths and flaws we are powerless to change. Each knight in the book struggles with a particular sin, sent by God as an individual test; but, Berger explains, "the only unforgivable sin is committed by the man who doth not use his gifts and therefore acts the coward to his own self, mocking the God who made him." The end of life is not happiness or triumph, for our sinful natures preclude these; we must simply do the best we can with what we are given, and lose. We can lose honorably or otherwise—that is our only choice.

This dark parable emerges from a 500-page narrative which is jumbled, fragmented, almost formless. Given Berger's consistent record of literacy and care, I think we can assume this is not unintentional. The Arthurian legend has always been a jumble, and Berger knows the source material in all its permutations and contradictions. Even the allusion to Freud, it turns out, is an echo of *The Once and Future King*.

One can even theorize that this jumbled effect—this deliberate splintering of character, narrative, and structure—might be Berger's mode of attack on the T.H. White novel, an attempt to erase the sanitized Camelot of *The Once and Future King* and restore the legend's mystery; to remind us that *Le Morte d'Arthur* continues to fascinate us because it is huge, redundant ("God's plenty," as Dryden called it) inconsistent—in fact, not a novel in the formal sense at all.

Surely there can be no question that—whatever future graduate students may find to write about Berger's sources—

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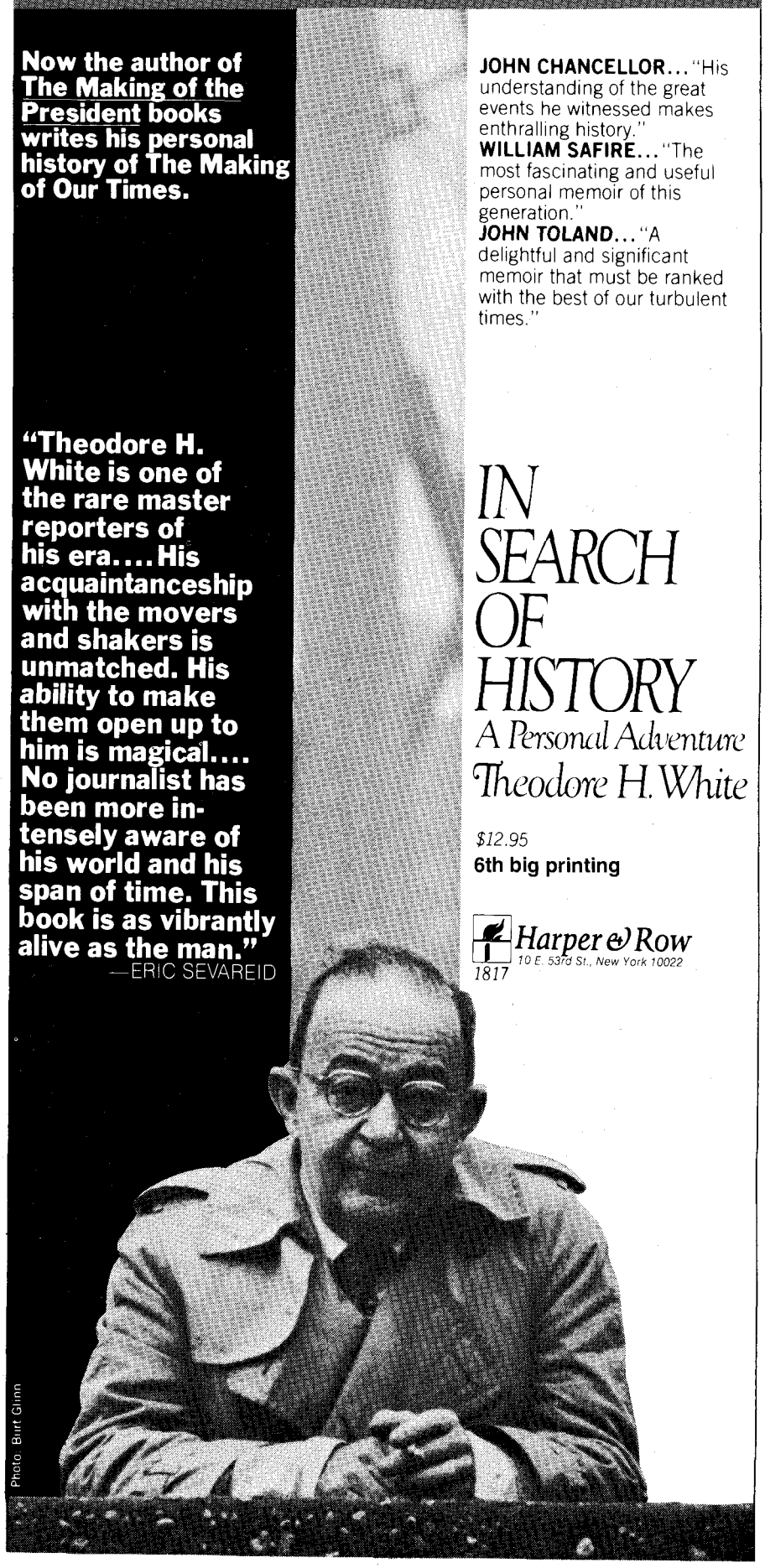
Photo: Burt Glinn

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most readers of this book will be familiar with White, and will measure *Arthur Rex* against it. And despite Berger's intelligence, wit, and integrity, the new novel loses the contest. White is a quirky and often exasperating writer. He makes a political fable, often at tedious length, out of the supernatural mysteries of the Holy Grail and the Lady of the Lake; his characters are sometimes caricatured and sometimes sentimentalized. Berger avoids these pitfalls, but *The Once and Future King* is still a better book than *Arthur Rex*, more fun to read, funnier and sadder.

Berger's book is much concerned with the problem of evil and the power that the wicked wield in this world. "Evil," he writes, "is always more easily managed than virtue." But his villains do not scare us, and this is a serious flaw. White's Mordred was a real figure of dread, the whining, injured little rotter we all hate and fear in ourselves; but Berger, who teams Mordred up with Morgan la Fey, manages only to produce a semi-comic medieval Boris and Natasha, energetically wicked without real menace.

The best characters in Berger's work continue to live in the reader's mind long after he has closed the book (I think particularly of Ralph Sandifer, the horny teenager of *Sneaky People*). Those in *Arthur Rex*, I predict, will fade. Readers will laugh at parts of this book, feel despair and grief at others; but after they have finished, it will be White's pompous, pacifistic Arthur, not Berger's doomed saint, who lingers in their minds.

Garrett Epps

Garrett Epps is fiction editor of *The Washington Monthly* and author of the novel, *The Shad Treatment* (Putnam's).

Alice, Let's Eat
by Calvin Trillin

(Random House; $7.95)

Of the various theories of literary criticism that have crossed my doorstep, none attracts me more than the one of a friend of mine, who asks of a book only that it contain an eating scene. The theory is not as simple as it may sound: the value of the work increases according to how much food is consumed, and how good it sounds. By these standards, the food writing of *New Yorker* columnist Calvin Trillin—collected in the 1974 classic *American Fried* and the new *Alice, Let's Eat*—must represent some kind of ideal. Never, I am quite sure, has there been so much sheer *relishing* in print.

Trillin is what is known in his native Midwest as a Big Hungry Boy, and in other segments of the culture as a *fresser*. In other words, unlike the "grown-up food writers" to whom his wife, Alice, frequently alludes, he couldn't care less what went into the quiche, just so long as he gets enough of it. It's not that Trillin is undiscriminating. He can't stand those pretentious eateries with names like "La Maison de la Casa House, whose notion of 'Continental cuisine' seems to have been derived in some arcane way from the Continental-Trailways bus company." Nor can he abide health food, especially when it is served up in restaurants "which seem modeled on the last days of a particularly unsuccessful commune."

The food Trillin adores could be called, by someone less kind than me, junk. In *Alice, Let's Eat*—like its predecessor, a collection of magazine articles detailing diverse pathways along Trillin's never-ending search for something decent to eat—the fare sampled includes barbecued mutton from western Kentucky, hog's pudding from an English country market, Nathan's french fries, New Mexico chili verde and tamales, red beans and rice from New Orleans, the concoction Joe Tess' Place in Omaha calls a Famous Fish Sandwich, and, above all, the brisket and ribs at Arthur Bryant's Barbecue in Kansas City, which Trillin allows is the single best restaurant in the world. Like the moviegoer who'd rather see *Kiss Me Deadly* than *Interiors*, he prefers the admittedly lowbrow slice of Americana to the warmed-over (or simply defrosted) European pastiche.

For all that, however, I enjoy Trillin most not for his evocation of good eats, but for his style. I think more people subscribe to my friend's theory than is commonly realized, and the pleasure they take in reading descriptions of Arthur Bryant's ambrosia-like burnt edges may lead them to overlook how wonderful a comic essayist Trillin is. Most important, he knows precisely how much of himself to reveal. His persona is composed of what must be real characteristics—for instance, to put it bluntly, a tendency toward gluttony—which are stripped of anything tiresome, intimate or complex, and turned into recurring comic motifs. As with his *New Yorker* compatriots Benchley, Perelman, Thurber, and Woody Allen, the character who emerges is apt to make himself the butt of the joke. "I have been with her at Bryant's," he says concerning his suspicion that Alice may merely be pretending to like barbecue, "when she stopped eating twenty or thirty minutes before I did, although in fairness I should say that the other people at the table stopped with her."

The rest of the world is similarly transformed. I happen to have eaten in some of the restaurants Trillin describes, and before reading him I found them unexceptional, if tasty. In his hands, though, nothing is banal or boring—every lunch counter has local color or transcendent grits, and every waiter is a character. It's a charmed universe.

Of course, Calvin Trillin is not the only humorist around who tells jokes on himself and eschews the dreary. What sets him apart from Erma Bombeck or David Brenner is his rhetorical prowess. All the chapters have a flawless logical progression, although the many toothsome digressions sometimes make this hard to discern. Moreover, Trillin must surely be the contemporary master of the simile; who else would regard a gourmet friend's dinner invitation "the way a Savings and Loan lobbyist might treat a note asking him to a small poker game with the members of the Senate Banking Committee"? He writes with invention, wit, and an impressively broad frame of reference. And he can switch modes effortlessly—from his understated domestic humor, to straight-ahead reporting (on, say, the disappearance of crabs from the West Coast), to social criticism of the American scene, no less.

Now for the bad news. *Alice, Let's Eat* is not quite as consistently delightful as *American Fried*. I blame this in part on the fact that in the new book Trillin is disappointed a number of times—by the Kentucky mutton, by a Vermont wild-

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game supper where he can't tell the beaver from the buffalo, by an Omaha steak that is variously compared by its proponents to a softball and a lump. Also, he ventures away from the US too often: there's a trip to Martinique, one to France, and two to England (where his escort is "Charley Plum," a thinly disguised version of *New York Times* correspondent and well-known Big Hungry Boy R.W. Apple). Transplanted from American soil, Trillin seems somehow out of place, like a hamburger stand on the Champs Élysées.

But read *Alice, Let's Eat*. Calvin Trillin, a classic American humorist, is also a worthy celebrant of one of the few authentic triumphs of American culture. His book will bring a smile to your lips and a growl to your stomach.

Ben Yagoda

Ben Yagoda, a freelance writer in New York, is film critic for *The American Spectator*.

Ernest Hemingway and his World by Anthony Burgess

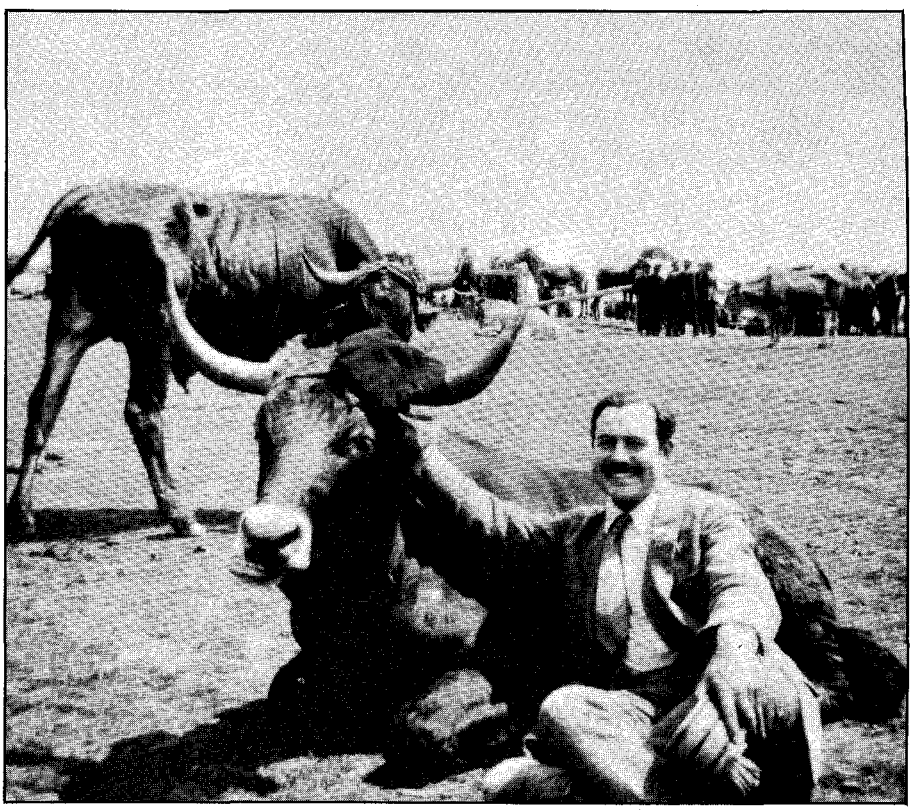
(Scribner's; $10.95)

There was a good deal of the bull-thrower in Hemingway; he was forever touching up his life to make it match his legend. It's still possible to hear one of his fancifications: on Ernest Hemingway Reading, a Caedmon record, he claimed to have once slept with Mata Hari; he found her "to be heavy throughout the hips and to have more desire for what was done to her than for what she was giving to the man." Anthony Burgess makes short work of this. Hemingway, he puckishly points out, did not arrive in Europe until 1918; Mata Hari had been shot as a spy the year before. It's a lie, certainly, but a charming one told by a man who combined the charming with the tragic in a rare degree. In this masterly portrait, Burgess evokes both sides of Hemingway—the compulsive braggadocio and, after *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940, the thwarted literary artist. He has been considerably aided by the photographs, many of them rare, that adorn every page.

The photographs record the surface of a life singularly adventurous, even reckless. These boyish words, however, carry a suggestion of morbidity when applied to Hemingway. The early shots—of Ernest as a bonneted baby, as the Barefoot Boy, as the unlikely Class Prophet (neckless in his Buster Brown collar but gravely handsome all the same) of his graduating class at the Oak Park and Forest River High School in Oak Park, Illinois—these early shots, understandably, are the least Hemingwayesque. One, however, shows an ample youth clutching a dead bird with one hand and holding a large thick phallus of a gun with the other. The creatures change, the guns get bigger or become fishing rods, but the pose appears again and again. Here is the essential Hemingway.

There follows a series of photographs from three wars. One shows a waggishly smiling Hemingway recovering from a wound (it had been heroically received) in Italy; in a second, a brindled-bearded Papa cheers up the GIs before D-Day; a third shows him making a propaganda film for Republican Spain. Hemingway was in Spain as a high-priced and somewhat inept war correspondent. "Compare him," Burgess remarks, "with another writer—George Orwell. Orwell had been a real fighter in Spain, in danger as much from the political treacheries on his own side as from the enemy's bullets. He had been unglamorously wounded and he was not well. But he quietly worked away in London at his ill-paid brilliant journalism. . . while Hemingway basked and boasted, was a boor and a bore." Hemingway, Burgess reminds us, never killed another human being, a fact that resonates.

Wives and bulls figure in most of the remaining pictures. Hemingway, who had four sisters, had four wives: Hadley, Pauline, Martha and Mary ("the ultimate Mrs. Hemingway") were all striking-looking women. The bull in the picture below is representative—but turn to page 46 for a shot of Hemingway in the path of an angrier specimen. There are, finally, the canonical *Life* magazine shots: of a pot-bellied Papa superintending his fighting cocks in Cuba; of a white-bearded old man taking a solitary walk in the snow. One supposes the time to be that last winter (1961) in Ketchum, Idaho. His face is hidden, but his gloved hands, poised in a helpless sort of gesture before his chest, and the whole attitude of his large expressive body, are eloquent of despair.



Ernest Hemingway (Photo No. EH 7976P) John F. Kennedy Library, Ernest Hemingway Collection

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He had reason to despair. He had been asked to write a sentence—one sentence—for a presentation volume honoring the newly elected JFK, but a whole day's work had produced nothing. "It just won't come any more." Mary Hemingway had to hide the key to the gunrack.

"What was wrong with Hemingway?" Burgess asks. "Possibly growing gloom at his failure to be his own myth; more possibly a sexual incapacity which, considering his prowess in other fields of virile action, deeply baffled him. . . . Or, simpler, Hemingway saw himself as an exception to the Thoreauvian rule of, like all men, having to live a life of quiet desperation; he could not cope with the stress that most men endure gracefully; he was too godlike to be expected to have to cope." Perhaps, too, he was caught in a terrible repetition. For, 33 years before he shot his brains across the porch at Ketchum, his father, Ed Hemingway, despondent over a hopeless illness, had stuck a Civil War pistol in his ear and pulled the trigger.

Hemingway had a bad end. But long before it, before the man who suffers overwhelmed the man who creates, he had had an austere ambition: to write what he called "a true simple declarative sentence." He had gone ahead and written it and, thereby, had made a revolution in writing that was also a revolution in feeling. Bombast and sentimentality would appear after Hemingway, would appear indeed in the later Hemingway, but nobody would call it good writing. Hemingway had introduced a new standard; a language of the "nerves and muscles," as Burgess says, to replace the old language of the head and heart. Burgess, rightly, in my view, hails this as Hemingway's greatest achievement. His own text is a model of its modest genre and a delight to read.

Jack Beatty

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Brief Reviews

Current Fiction

Black Angus
by Newton Thornburg

(Little, Brown; $8.95)

This is probably not the right time for a book like *Black Angus*. Despite its value and power, Newton Thornburg's second novel comes directly out of the Hemingway "macho" mold we have put behind us. The heroes we now admire are men who are not confined to their "male" roles. Our heroes are fuller human beings, more sensitive to the emotional needs of others, and ready to accept the full equality of their partners. We are not strongly drawn to the struggle of a man for "his life as a man"—it doesn't seem worth the fight.

But perhaps it is. Ultimately, Robert Blanchard's struggle is for something far more important than his manhood—his dignity as a human being. A slick advertising executive with a comfortable life and a numbing job, Blanchard rebels against the gross hypocrisy and materialism of city life and retreats to the country, determined to prove himself a hardy pioneer.

Blanchard sinks his whole life—financial and emotional—into his quest to survive on a small cattle ranch with his spoiled wife, sickly son and retarded brother. Nothing goes right—beef prices plunge, his herd is quarantined with a rare bovine disease, and his wife and son, unable to cope with the loneliness and unending work their new life forces on them, withdraw from him. Finally, they go home to "daddy," a rich doctor with a huge house waiting, and beg Blanchard to follow. To top it off, his bank calls in his loans. But Blanchard refuses to quit.

In his fierce determination to keep his land and lifestyle, Blanchard loses everyone dear to him; his wife and son, his best friend, his mistress—a bitter country girl seeking desperately to escape her home and her past—and his retarded brother Tommy. The relationship between the two brothers, their commitment to each other, is by far the most effective character interplay Thornburg achieves. Their love is real and deeply felt, and makes Tommy's horrible death almost unbearable. At the end, Blanchard is left with nothing but his pain.

Anguish pervades *Black Angus*, a black pessimism about the chances of victory against the incessantly hostile forces of nature, or even the possibility of human communication in the struggle. Blanchard is not really a "macho" hero, proving his virility in a battle with his land, but a sensitive and complex man who cannot retain control over his destiny, who risks everything and loses it all, except his humanity. Thoughtful and bitter, absorbing and painful, with a rich narrative and wrenching climax, *Black Angus* is more than it first appears. The manhood it seeks to preserve is generic; the struggle it records, universal; the defeat it suggests, tragic.

Neil Pickett

Neil Pickett is a reporter for *The National Law Journal*.

Uncle
by Julia Markus

(Houghton Mifflin; $7.95)

The beginning of *Uncle* promises a story rich in images and detail. "On that spring day in Jersey City," Julia Markus writes, "the sun had dissolved the clouds. . . . Irv had his revelation." But once that day is over, the story of Irv Bender's life is set forth with all the imagination of a series of file cards pasted together. The writing, lush but empty, dissolves an idea that could have produced a moving account of a man in his intricate, self-contained world.

The characters are meant to be a pastiche of that world, the Jewish community of Jersey City before and during World War II. Mandy Mershheimer, Irv Bender's best friend, became a famous writer with Irv's blessing and support; Babe Bender, his brother, becomes a failure in Irv's shadow. Irv himself, whose immediate goal is wealth, goes into the camp business at Rose Lake, and quickly succeeds. His brother commits suicide. His mother dies. His brother's daughter, Suzanne, becomes—for some unexplained reason—a central figure in Irv's life, making him an Uncle and making Mandy, who becomes Suzanne's first

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love, a brother and a son. By this time it is World War II, and there are so many disparate things happening that if the reader blinks, he or she is likely to miss the birth, arrival, or death of a major character.

Miss Markus has considerable skill as a writer, but that does not make up for her shortcomings as an architect of plot. The story jumps from Mandy to Irv to Suzanne and back again, it skips years in the space of a paragraph and then devotes pages to a few moments of time. Is the reader to presume that all these years are unimportant, that nothing much happened to precipitate the apocalyptic scenes Markus has included? Had the artist stepped back, she might have seen the spots on her canvas that needed paint.

Uncle received the Literary Fellowship Award from its publisher, Houghton Mifflin; Julia Markus follows a long line of distinguished recipients—Philip Roth, Willie Morris, Robert Penn Warren and others. There is no doubt that she is entitled to recognition as a potentially talented writer, but she needs to expand on her promise.

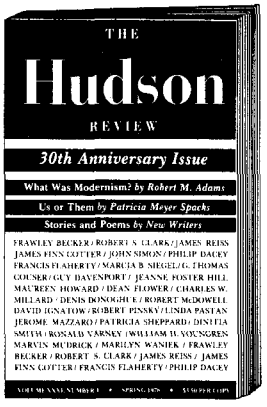
D.B.

The Suicide's Wife
by David Madden
(Bobbs-Merrill; $8.95)

A map of the human spirit would show that most of us live somewhere between the euphoric independence Thoreau supposedly enjoyed at Walden and the crushing dependence Solzhenitsyn observed in prisoners of the Gulag Archipelago. Ann, David Madden's title character, grew up in a ghetto and was humiliated by the fact that her mother was a drunkard and her brothers were in prison. She had accepted her dependence as passively as a young and unformed Nora introduced by marriage to the securities of a doll's house. Husband Wayne Harrington was a college professor, an obscure poet in both senses of the word, a hifalutin' PhD who wrote about the Pearl Poet and "honored" Ann by marrying her *before* her first child's birth. The child died, and Wayne gave her three more children but nothing of himself. No hint even of the frustrations that drove him to kill himself. Or was he, contrary to official reports, a murder victim?

His death leads Ann to a psychological investigation: an effort to track down the real Wayne Harrington by questioning people who knew him. The investigation turns up less and more than she seeks and teaches her above all that her passivity and dependence had been only short of suicidal. "Goddamnit," a friend of Kurt Vonnegut told him, "you've got to be kind." Struggling to be kind, Ann had allowed five youngsters to rape her when she was twelve. Widowed, she begins to assert herself against those who would pity or brutalize her. She learns to drive Wayne's car and fights her way through seemingly epical failures to earn her driver's permit.

The Beautiful Greed, Madden's first novel, told of a young sailor's initiation into sea life and revealed his proletarian sympathies. Such sympathies—to cite only B. Traven's fiction—are usually coupled with a cynical attitude toward the police though the individual cop may have working-class origins and even an anarchistic grudge against any type of authority. In 1968, the year of Madden's story, the nationwide rioting that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King put the men in blue on the defensive. This, apart from Madden's dislike of lawmen, helps explain the tactics of the officer who tests Ann's driving skills. He tries to seduce her, crowns each chauvinistic insult with a viler one, and denounces her in front of a



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fellow officer as "the dumbest woman I have ever *give* this test to." Ann's triumph over this lout is an A-plus for Women's Lib and a blow against the people in her West Virginia town who despise women without men. It marks an irreversible turn in her fortunes, evidence that what had been grimness and near-tragedy is moving toward an unwritten success story.

Madden's new work is a turnabout from his last novel. *Bijou* (1974) was autobiographic fiction, a 500-page loving rerun—occasionally in slow motion—of one year of a boy's life. By contrast the prose of *The Suicide's Wife* is spare. Whole scenes, sometimes with loss, flash by the reader in a few sentences; but the general effect is one of power, of a measured discipline closer to the artistry of Scott Fitzgerald than to the wild abundance of Thomas Wolfe, Madden's early literary hero.

James Walt

James Walt writes for *The Washington Post, The Washington Star,* and other publications.

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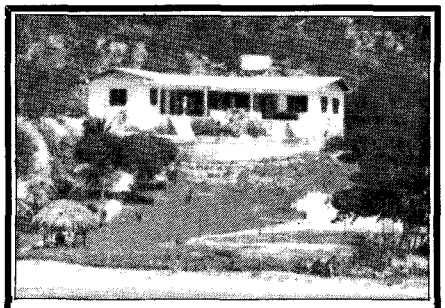

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Washington Diarist

A Little Enjoyment

So Ronald Reagan has made it clear that if nominated, he will run, and if elected, he will serve, and that he is already running anyway. It is the first piece of expected good news that both Jimmy Carter and the Democratic Party have had for 1980. The Republicans have built the first of their funeral pyres. The stench of smoke—if not yet of flesh—is already in one's nostrils. I do not know if you listen regularly to Reagan's daily talks on the radio. From his point of view, they are most effective. They must make Gerald Ford bite his lip, and poor William Brock tear his hair. But from any wider point of view, such as winning an election, they have one fatal flaw. They are chants of doom. Unless we have the neutron bomb, unless we have yet another aircraft carrier, unless we cut taxes, unless we stop busing . . . America will go on being the dismal place which the Democrats have made it, and slip further and further into the slough of despond. The converted may feed on this apocalyptic talk, but when the time comes the unconverted will look around, and find that America is not a bad place to be at all, even as the Democrats have made it over the years. Bagehot once had the best of advice for all conservatives. "Try a little enjoyment," he said. Tell people that here is their country to enjoy. But no! Not the Republicans. Not especially their conservatives. Not Goldwater and not Reagan. The fall is here. The sun is bright. The skies are clear. But there is Reagan: "The Russians have developed a tank whose armor. . . ." It won't wash.

I have just seen the first issue of the revived *Life* magazine, which is to appear monthly from now on. As was promised by its publisher and editors, it is pictures with a minimum of text. But how can pictures last a month? The point of a monthly magazine is that it should lie around the house, to be picked up from time to time, when one reads something that one missed before or had put aside. But why go back to the pictures for four weeks, when there is a stream of new pictures on television? Not even today's readers have reached this level of unresisting stupefaction. At least *People* and *Us*, which are for televiewers, tell them something about what they are looking at. But this is not what is most pathetic about the new *Life*. It is so bland, so lacking in inspiration, containing nothing of today. You pick it up, run through the table of contents, flick over the pages, and it might be *Life* of 1957—Pre-Sputnik *Life*, so to speak. A little bit of royalty—the Shah of course. A little bit of science—which for *Life* means babies. It is the mixture as before. Eisenhower disembalmed.

As we gazed at the new *Life*, some colleagues and I talked of the decline of the magazine of general interest. *Life* and *Look* and *Esquire* all were still journalistically enterprising not so long ago. Now both the new *Life* and the new *Esquire* show that the spark has gone. Other general interest magazines on a different level—such as *Harper's*—also are finding it difficult to find and sustain an identity. One of my colleagues made an interesting point, which is intriguing to a Washington Diarist. These magazines still are edited from New York, he said, but the impetus in the world of ideas has passed from there to Washington. It is not just that the new ideas bubble up here, he said. It is here that writers want their ideas to appear, where they will have an immediate impact on those with power and influence. He is right. By the time that Bakke reaches the New York magazines, *The Washington Post* and *The New Republic* have dealt with the case from every angle. I can reinforce the point from my own experience. It is possible to make a freelance career in Washington today in a way that was not possible 10 years ago. In so far as I write for New York, I do not go to it, I wait for it to come to me.

I was talking to one of the secretaries at the Russian Embassy, a wholly delightful man whom I have known off and on for many years. As we drank, in the kind of atmosphere that made one wish for a fireplace over one's shoulder to toss the glass into, he expatiated as only the Russians can. "Russia is turning Slavophil again. It is very interesting, running through all our intellectual life. . . . Solzhenitsyn is giving up his art for politics. It is a besetting sin of Russian writers." (Coming from someone who had just said, with a smile, "Of course, I'm a Marxist," this remark was breathtaking.) In a moment, we were on a grand tour of the 19th-century novel. Russians are the only people left who really believe in the novel. "I can't take Tolstoy," I said at one moment. "I'm with you there," he agreed with ardor. I asked him about the new Russian Embassy, which appropriately stands near the Washington Cathedral. It is all but completed but, under the American-Russian agreement, the Russians cannot move into their new embassy until the Americans move into their own new one in Moscow, and of course the American Embassy has not even been started. But Russians are nothing if not stoical. "I am not sure it will be good to be up there by the Cathedral. From where we are now we can walk to the restaurants downtown. Now we will have to take a car." That's what I like about the Communists. First things first. How are they going to get to the Sans Souci at lunchtime? But as always the moment comes when the conversation is shut down. An old American friend of his made a joke about Russia's lack of freedom. The secretary laughed in protest, "You must be drunk already," and so the signal was given that this line of talk should be dropped.

My favorite sociologist in America, Howard Higman of Colorado University, was in town last week on one of his periodic missions to enlighten some subcommittee or lecture some agency. (He is my favorite sociologist because he denies that sociology actually exists.) One evening he was regaling an audience of his admirers, of both sexes, with his observations of how women get men to do things without in fact asking them. He explained that his wife uses moral statements that are thrown on the air: "Someone who really cared for his house would shovel the snow from the roof." But his best observations are of what he calls the "non-specific particular," by which women get their men to go from one room to another, as when a woman shouts from another room, "What are these?" She expects the man to get up and go to see what she is talking about, and usually she is not disappointed. But one friend once struck back at his wife. (No couple could, by the way, have adored each other more.) When his wife returned home one day, and shouted to him in his study, "Did they come?" the husband, not knowing what she was talking about, nevertheless said "Yes!" The wife shouted to him again. "Where did you put them?" He shouted back, "With the others." For the first time in years of matrimony, the rest of his day at work was undisturbed.

H.F.

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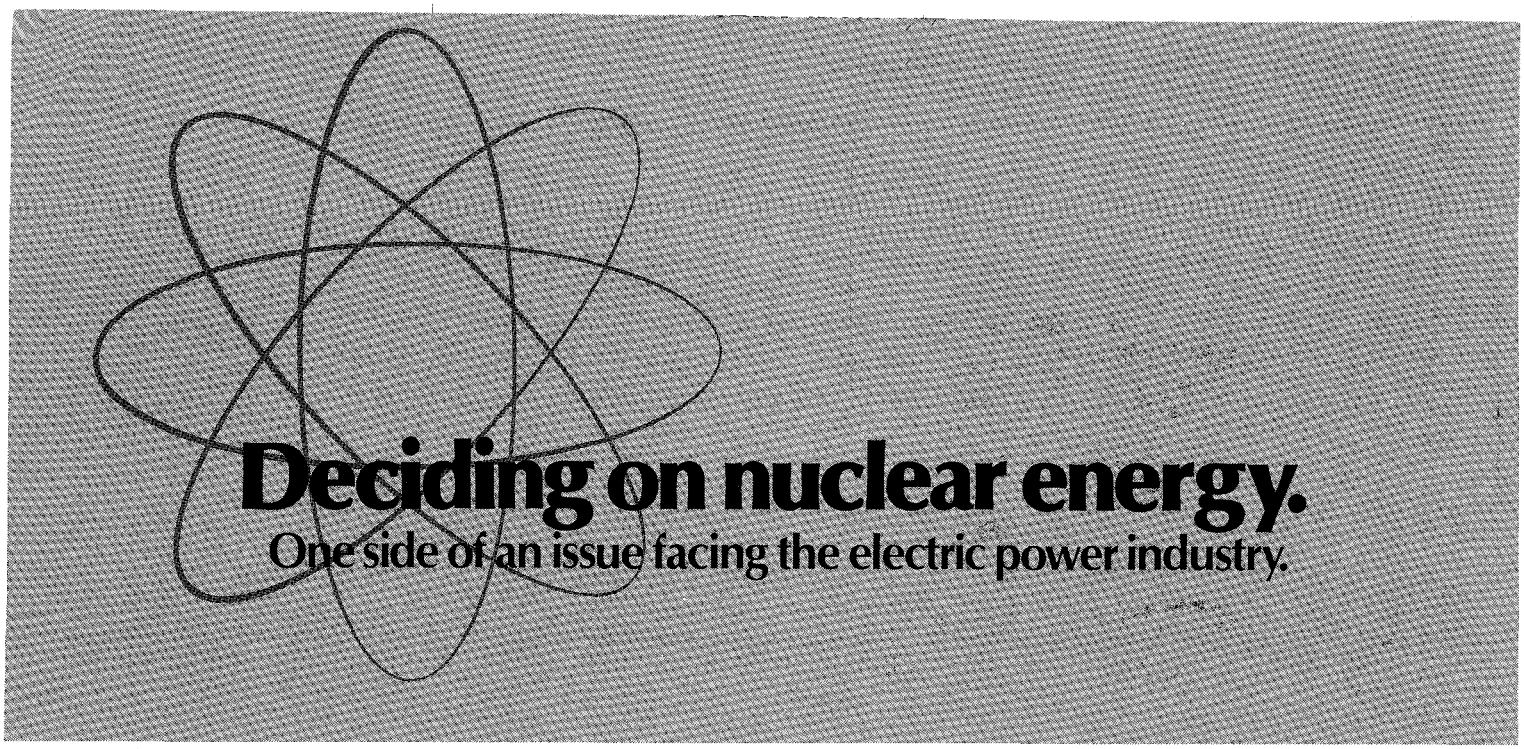

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A clean record

Nuclear generation of electricity has grown because of its safety, reliability and economy. No other industry started with a greater appreciation of potential hazards. None is operated under more stringent occupational and environmental safeguards.

The American Medical Association's Council on Scientific Affairs recently reported that, among the principal fuels available for electricity production over the next 25 years, nuclear power has the lowest adverse impact on health.

The near future

Nuclear power makes economic sense in meeting growing energy demands and in reducing the nation's dependence on oil and gas.

Unless we try to rely entirely on coal production for generation, or to shut down the economy until forms like solar power prove affordable, nuclear power will become increasingly important to the near-term well-being of the country.

Nuclear policy

The electric utility industry agrees with the many expert opinions that ultimate disposal of radioactive wastes presents no insurmountable technical problems. Several acceptable methods are available.

But failure of the federal government to implement available nuclear waste disposal technology is being mistakenly seen as an indication that the nuclear waste issue cannot be resolved.

Recently, we urged the Administration to take advantage of extensive, existing technical and scientific knowledge and to implement a program on a rigid schedule to provide a spent-fuel storage facility and a waste repository at the earliest practical time. These steps are necessary to assure the continued operation of nuclear power plants, to minimize the uncertainty that has been slowing down commitments for future nuclear plants in this country, and to separate the waste disposal issue from the licensing of new power plants.

Congress has divided responsibility for the national waste management program among several agencies of the federal government. The Department of Energy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency have elements of responsibility.

Now, Congress must provide additional effective legislative guidance for the waste management and spent-fuel storage programs.

The long run

Opinion polls repeatedly show that majorities of the American people support the use of nuclear energy to generate electricity. Where nuclear plants are in operation, the percentages are even higher.

If we are to be able to take advantage of the economic and energy-supply opportunities presented by nuclear energy, both in the near term and the long term, the federal government will need to take responsible action today.

If you would like to read more about nuclear energy as a source of electricity or learn more about the management of high-level radioactive wastes and spent fuel, write to us: Edison Electric Institute, 90 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016. We will be glad to send you more information.

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